NMP

#5 MAY

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CHUCK HUBER

MARK EVANIER

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On Comics Opinion and Comics Review

Claremont & Byrne's 'THE ALL-NEW, ALL-DEAD X-MEN'

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Fandom's Forum

#5 MAY

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LINES OF COMMUNICATION

EDITORIAL by BOB SORON

Currently, it seems to be a little fashionable to decry the comics companies' policy of selling items only through the direct-sales markets. The ostensible claim is that, by doing this, the comics companies are limiting their market to the people who have access to these retailers.

Speaking as a comics fan, I'm not all that concerned about the possibility of comics going direct-sales only. Not that I don't think it'll happen—I think it's a couple years away at most—but because I am simply not convinced that that is harmful for comics.

For instance, the limited availability of books outside of bookstores hasn't hurt that industry terribly. I have much better luck getting the records I want at record shops rather than department stores. You can get a home computer at a couple dozen department stores across the country, but most of the ¾-million sold this year will be sold in computer stores.

I think the last situation, oddly enough, is the most analagous to comics'. If you get a home computer at a department store, you may pay a slightly lower price, but that's because there is no provision for service. Now, at a newsstand, not only is there no provision for service ["This ain't a newsstand!"], but there is not price break, and there is no guarantee that you're going to get every comic you want. At a comics shop, you **are** going to get service—in a much wider selection than you are likely to find at a newsstand and a storeful of people to talk to and pick up the latest gossip and opinions. Besides that, you're likely to get a price break [I understand some parts of the country are actually undergoing price wars], and you can count on a fairly consistent selection. You may not be able to get every issue of every comic you want, but at least you can predict what you will have to look for elsewhere.

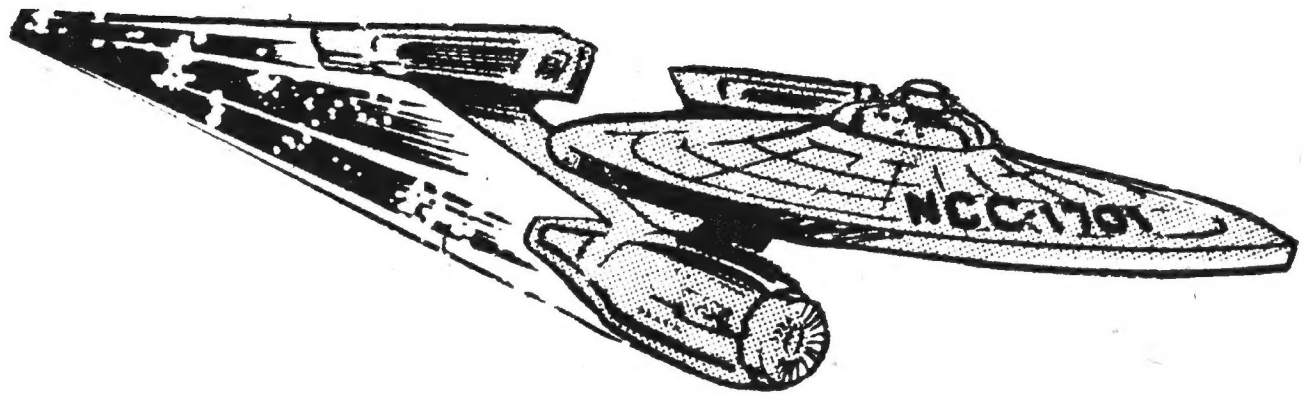
As for the doomsayers who have been pointing to lower sales and suggesting that the industry is breathing its last, I'm equally cynical. Sales have been declining for virtually every print medium for the last twenty-five years. Granted, it would be nice if sales were still in the millions, and there have been bad management decisions made by every company in the business. But when comics went up to 12– twenty years ago, people said that was it. When comics go up to 75–, people will say that is it. But these people forget that most fans are willing to pay $3.50 or $5.95 for essentially the same thing—or even $75 for four volumes of essentially the same thing. 75– looks like less and less when you consider the alternatives.

The fandom of the 1980s, don't forget, is going to be based substantially on the generation whose parents were, or still are, collectors. The parents have already been through many price changes. They are used to the fact. And, even if they no longer read comics, they surely still have a fondness for them. When their children want a comic, they won't be too resistant to saying "yes."

Comics shops, by and large, are no longer freaks of nature that get written up in the newspaper. Every city has a bunch. And now some newsstands are going to direct-sales distributors to get their comics supplies. The method of distribution may be changing, but, after the transition, the situation will not be so substantially different from when we used to get our comics at the corner newsstand.

No, I think comics are safe for a while yet.

Remember, **LOC** always welcomes unsolicited contributions, both writing and art. You'll note we have three new writers this issue—Darren Madigan, Joel Thingvall, and Paul Balze. Why not add your name to the list? Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced; artwork should be black-and-white on white cardboard or paper. Our new address is 18 Eliot St., Cambridge, MA 02138. We're looking forward to hearing from you.



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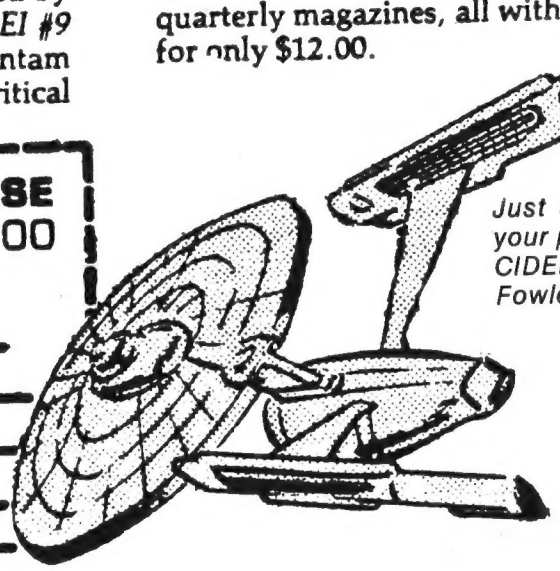

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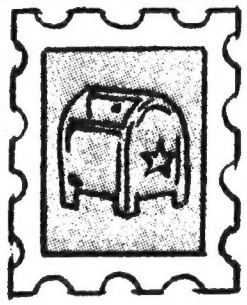
Mark Evanier has written everything from *PINK LADY & JEFF* to Marvel's fine Hanna-Barbera comics. He is currently working as a Consulting Editor to NMP's graphic magazine line.



WHAT IT WAS WAS FANDOM

Part Two

by Mark Evanier

There's a game that I invented and often play with fans called "Backseat Editor [Patent Pending]." It doesn't require dice or pieces or a board or going to jail or taking a ride on the Reading. In it, you get to be the editor of DC or Marvel and you get to cancel books, reassign writers and artists and, in general, come up with a list of exactly what you'd publish, given the chance, and who'd create it. And a lot of the responses I see are quite fascinating. I've seen Legion of Super-Heroes fans who feel that DC should publish nine or ten comics a month of the Legion of Super-Heroes. And you have other fans who want every single Marvel book to be written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Neal Adams. This is their utopia. Everyone who plays this game reveals their own little peccadilloes and passions. A lot of folks want to roll back the Art Form to exactly where comics were when they were thirteen years old and maybe happier with their lives than they are today.

I don't know what you want out of comics or fandom. Hell, I don't even know what **I** want out of it. But I think that what we all want will only be found if the form diversifies and matures. And I don't think it will diversify or mature much if the folks who write for fanzines keep selling what strike me more and more as rigid, intractable and sometimes benevolently blind standards. By "benevolently blind," I mean that if a comic has one thing that they're desperate for, they are willing to forgive all other flaws. Jim Shooter, the head honcho up at Marvel, said this in an interview once and I'm paraphrasing it but I think I do so accurately. He said that fans are very forgiving. They don't find enough passion in comic book writing in general but, when a comic comes along that has passion in its writing, they are willing to forgive all else. And he tossed out an example or two of comics that were, on balance, badly drawn and/or filled with superfluous, stifling copy... but the **intent** was good, the passion was there, and the fans went ape-doody over them. I think I agree with this and I'll take it one step further. I think that when the books in question didn't sell [because of the bad art and cluttered captions], the fans said, "Well, that proves they were too good for the public. They were over the kiddies' heads and they only appealed to the small core of intellectuals like me." Surrre, they were.

I guess what I'm saying is that I've really come to be fed up with folks who formulate their own narrow views of what's good and become fervently uncritical towards their favorites and maniacally arrogant about how anyone who holds an alternate viewpoint is just plain wrong and that's all there is to it.

Comic book artists have many and varied art styles. Not all of them, mind you. We have an awful lot of Neal Adams emulators running about and their work is huzzahed by many, not because these clones are good but because, from what I can tell, they **remind you** of someone who has talent. Art styles are a matter of individual tastes and there are many artists around whose styles I personally don't care for, but I can see that they are good, competent artists and they have their followings and that's fine. [It's the same way with other aspects of comics, too. I have Zero Interest in sword-and-sorcery. I don't like the good stuff, I don't like the bad stuff, I simply have no feel for it, either as writer or reader. I kinda wish I did because, obviously, a lot of folks are getting something out of it that I'm not.]

Oh, I didn't used to be so tolerant of artists whose styles I didn't like. I said some awful things about some of them back when I was younger and confusing Stubbornness with Being Discerning. I had

my favorite art styles—the way I thought a comic should be drawn—and I made the mistake of saying, of those artists who didn't draw like that, that they were untalented. I said that they couldn't draw comics or shouldn't draw comics and, in one case, I think I even questioned one artist's right to live.

In the years since, I've come to appreciate the works of some of those artists, including the one whom I wanted instantly put to death. I now see something in their works to which I was heretofore blind. Some of the others I still can't warm to, but I now see that they are good, that they have their place in this field and if I were ever appointed Czar of the business [which, let's face it, could happen tomorrow], I'd not only employ them, I'd encourage them to maintain their individual viewpoints. A few of the artists I didn't like then, I still think simply aren't very talented... but the point is that, insofar as most artists I didn't like were concerned, the problem wasn't with them, it was with me. I was so in love with the way one artist drew a character that I couldn't appreciate his replacement's version. I was so "in" to slick inking styles that I thought all the guys with non-slick styles were merely trying to be slick and doing a bad job of it.

And as I read zines today, I sometimes get very uncomfortable over how unthinkingly rude some writers are to those artists whose styles they don't like. I get uncomfortable because they remind me of **me**, back then. They say, "He's just hacking it out," about an artist who, if he's doing nothing else, is at least putting a lot of effort into his pages. Or, worse, they say, "Well, everyone knows that So-and-so is a rotten artist." And the So-and-so they mention is always someone I think isn't that bad; often, it's someone I think is a lot better than the artist they adore. I don't mind someone not liking an artist I like but I do mind them confusing a style they don't like with a lack of basic ability. I also mind them slandering an artist without perceiving that he was placed on the wrong strip with the wrong inker [his editor's fault, not his]. And I especially mind when they libel an artist as if his lack of talent is an established fact—like we had a big referendum and all of fandom agreed that So-and-so was a no-talent hack. That kind of sentiment—which has become almost **de rigeur** in some zines—passes out of the realm of opinion. I'm going to use Don Heck here as an example, not because I like much of his work very much [I do] but because he's recently been the target of this. I think the man has an awful lot of fans out there and I base this on his general sales record [his **KA-ZAR** issues sold better than John Buscema's and his **X-MEN** books sold better than Neal Adams'] and on the fact that many professionals praise him, including Jack Kirby and Dick Giordano, to say nothing of the many who routinely "swipe" their girl drawings from Heck love comics. Also, a few years ago, I took a poll at a panel I was on at a San Diego Con. I was about to collaborate with Heck on a project which, alas, never came to be. And I said how much I liked his work and asked if there were any other Don Heck fans in the room and, sure enough, about 90% of those present raised their hands—maybe a hundred in all. Paul Levitz was on the panel with me; he can verify this. I'm not arguing just this moment that all of us are correct, you understand. Just that there are a number of us out here and if you don't care for his style, fine. But if you say [as a few have] that no one likes Heck's work—or that only folks with no taste like his work—then I'm going to argue that you are just maybe guilty of, if not an outright factual error, then certainly a bit of faulty perception. And if I wanted to be as rude as you, I might suggest that you're unable to appreciate what a lot of others like about Heck's work and that, rather than understand, you've chosen to be arrogant about your opinions. There is such a thing in fandom as a Snob Writer who argues that anyone who likes what he doesn't [or vice-versa] is a clothhead. ["Settles for mediocrity" is a favorite harpoon of such folks.] That's one way of looking at it. The other way is that maybe those who disagree see something in the work to which the Snob Writer is blind.

By the way, there's a technical term for what these Snob Writers do. It's called "being an asshole."

None of this would be so important to comics but for the fact that, like I said a few reams ago, the fans and the pros have grown very close, in some ways **too** close. Not only are the fanzines so damned important to today's comic book industry but the companies are slowly giving up on newsstand sales and beginning to sell through comic book specialty shops and to gear the content of their comics to that market.

I know this is getting hopelessly long but I've got to flash back here, for a moment. When zines were young and so was I, you had comic book companies selling 300,000 copies of a book. If a comic dipped below 200,000 it was almost an automatic cancellation. Now, there's no way of counting how many comic book fans have existed, but I doubt I'll get much disagreement if I say that, at least on a **per capita circulation** basis, there were a lot less of us then than there are now. And back then, pros used to say, "You fans have such elite tastes. If we published books the way you want them, we'd be out of business in a week." They actually said that. And they ridiculed as hopelessly idealistic pipe dreams, a lot of fan suggestions like republishing the "Golden Age" DC first issues and having crossovers between DC and Marvel characters and bringing back Captain Marvel and doing a strip of the Justice Society and doing a comic book version of Conan. I'm not kidding here. If you'd gotten up at a 1966 comic book convention and asked a panel of pros, "Hey, why don't you adapt Conan for a comic book?" you'd have been ridiculed and called a damn fool. They'd have said, "You fans are always coming up with these stupid, unrealistic ideas that have no concept of the market and no concept of what's commercial and yadda yadda yadda." I actually heard a comic book artist say this to a fan [made the fan feel like dung, too] and, a few years later, this very artist was working on the Conan comic book when it was one of Marvel's five or so best-selling titles. And they've done all the other stupid fandom ideas, too—some not as successful.

On this and the other pages of the article, artist Hannah Shapero illustrates some of the simpler, less money-oriented pleasures to be found in comics fandom. Illustrations are ©1982 Hannah Shapero.

That's the way it was. Now, here's the way it is. Today, very few comics sell near 300,000 and a lot sell under 100,000. Oh, the guys at the companies will tell you that comic book sales have never been better but you know better than that. Newsstand sales are way off, sales to "fans" via specialty shops are the wave of the future and the companies are hiring folks to go around to the fans, find out what they want in comics and adjust the books accordingly. Slowly but certainly, DC and Marvel are getting into the fanzine business.

And it scares the crap out of me, it really does. Because of what I said earlier about how the fanzine writers are advancing these very narrow standards. They're overlooking some fine work that's around today, just as the fans at the conventions overlook some fine comics that still can be found for a quarter apiece. And it scares me that some very fine artists in the comic book field [mostly old-timers who've given faithful service and who really know how to draw, sans gimmickry] are going to find themselves either unemployed or in disfavor with their companies because those companies are now catering to the narrow, narrow tastes that the fan market is voicing.

[Go back and re-read that paragraph again. I just did and I realized that it's kind of significant.]

I am reminded of an hour that I spent, several years ago, with the late Bob Brown. This was before he was the **late** Bob Brown, natch. He was drawing again for DC, having just returned from a few years at Marvel, and I wanted to meet him. Now, here was a man with thirty or so years of service to the comic book field. He'd drawn some very good comics and some very bad ones. I was never wild about his style but I appreciated his abilities and his consistency. A lot of us didn't care for his work on the later issues of **CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN** he did, inking himself. But then he'd done **SUPERBOY**, inked by Wally Wood and Murphy Anderson and it was very good, very strong art. Anyway, we talked for a time about his work. He was a very gentle, soft-spoken man and when he said the following to me, it was without the slightest bit of hostility or resentment; rather, it was with a general sense of being **lost** in a business that he thought he knew pretty well. He said, "I don't understand what they want of me. I was in the office a few months ago and the editor wasn't too happy with what I'd turned in. He didn't really say what was wrong with it but he pulled out this other story that someone had just turned in and he showed it to me and he said, 'Can't you give me something like this?' And I looked at the story and there was obviously a lot of excitement on the pages but I also saw bad perspective and figures that were way out of proportion and there was one panel where everyone had shadows all over their faces outdoors as if there were about nine hundred different suns in the sky. There was one panel where one of the people

had shrunk down to real small—you know, like Tom Thumb—and the artist hadn't drawn anything in for a size comparison. The character was standing by a rock and a rock can be any size. I've done a lot of things with people shrinking or growing and you always put something in the panel for comparison, like a telephone or something. I didn't think it was very good work but the editor kept saying this was what they wanted so I tried it. I swiped a lot of figures out of their current books and it made them happier, next job I did, but I'm not sure what I was doing."

I thought it was rather sad. I was never a huge fan of Brown's work but he'd given me a few hours of reading enjoyment and I somehow felt he deserved better. I don't know who the artist was whose work Brown was shown [though I have a few guesses] but I think I know the reason. I think the artist being used as an example was arousing some fervor in the fanzines. The companies started to really care about pleasing the zine crowd, especially now that they seem to have no other market left. And my fear is that, if the trend continues into the dealer-direct shops, a lot of Bob Browns are going to find themselves shunted aside in their own business by a lot of bad Neal Adams imitators. I have a hunch that comics will get more and more homogenized as the companies cater more and more to these narrow, narrow tastes that I keep harping about.

You know that aphorism about the meek inheriting the earth? Well, I think that fandom is inheriting the comic book business. And since fandom isn't too much fun anymore, I don't see how comic books are going to be any more fun than fandom is.

Perhaps I'm worrying needlessly. But when I was in Earl Bowman's shop, he'd posted the ad that Marvel sends out to dealers about upcoming releases to get them to order in bulk. And, on a number of the listings, it said, as the big selling point for a comic, "Cover by Frank Miller."

That's exactly how we used to sell fanzines back in 1967.

Exactly how we used to sell fanzines back in 1967.

Comic book fandom is just turning twenty-one years old by some folks' reckoning and I think it's time it started growing up. This Art Form—comic books—can be so much. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have so many of them filling this house. And I think you believe it because you've come this far in this article, wading through all manner of ranting and pontification. Maybe you don't like what I like in comics and maybe I don't like what you like in comics. **That's not the point**. We're all comics fans. I don't care how many hundreds [over a thousand, in fact] of the things I've written professionally, I'm still a comic book fan and so are you. Like Lenny Bruce said, we're all the same schmuck. We all have a passion for this industry and all its unrealized potential. Sometimes, we unleash these passions in a rude, destructive [or certainly non-constructive] manner. Sometimes, we are all blind to the good work that has been done and is being done. How many Carl Barks fans are there out there who didn't know the work was **that good** until someone told you it was **that good**? There is a wealth of comic book history that is being lost forever while the zines do features on John Byrne's chiropractor or maybe the eight thousandth interview of Will Eisner. A lot of the zines only do interviews with Byrne and Eisner because they believe [correctly, it sometimes turns out] that you only care about Byrne and Eisner and maybe a half-dozen other comic creators. Well, gang, trust me on this. You can enjoy comics so much more if you'll just open the blinders a tad and stop taking it all so

damned seriously. Look for the old comics that don't cost an arm, a leg and the extra limb of your choice. Look for the current comics that are good but don't get ballyhooed a lot and tell others about them. Be willing to accept a good comic even if someone's told you it's dreck. Look for the alternative comics that deserve your support and support them. And, above all, let's get some of this dreary finance and comics company office politics out of fandom and start enjoying the comics again.

Back to basic, folks. Back to basics.

One last story and then I'll get out of your way. I saved this one for the end; it's the one about the "it" dealer I mentioned columns and columns ago.

This is the first thing I've written for a fanzine in quite some time, other than a few quickies to help friends. Because of what's happened these last few years, I can't afford to write for fanzines like I once did.

[No, I'm not talking about the fact that I want to get paid for my writing, now that I do it for a living. I don't mind writing for free. In fact, I **like** writing for free if the article has a purpose. I wrote this for free. Let me explain the problem...]

One comic that I always liked was **THE FOX AND THE CROW**. It always hit me as a very entertaining, well-done comic with amazing longevity and an unparalleled ingenuity over the long haul by its creators. A few years back, I wrote two articles about the comic, telling its history and why I liked it. The main one was for the **AMAZING WORLD OF DC** magazine. It was published by DC and, when I wrote the article, I had to leave out the part about how one of the DC editors screwed the comic up when he seized control. But no matter; I did the piece for next to no money... because I thought it should be done.

A month or so after it saw print, I was padding around a con with my little list of **FOX AND CROW** comics that I needed to complete my collection. I found a cache on one dealer's table but, when I inquired about price, they were four or five times above the norm. I asked why.

You know why.

Me and my big mouth. The dealer hauled out the latest issue of **AMAZING WORLD**, which he was also selling and motioned to my piece, little supposing I was its author. "I figure I'm gonna have a big run on these, on account of this article," he said. The big run hadn't begun yet [though it did, soon after] but you all know how dealers are. And now you know why I said I couldn't afford to write any more pieces on the great comics of the past. The same thing happened with **SUGAR AND SPIKE** comics, issues of **HERBIE** and a half-dozen others which have skyrocketed in price and which I must take at least part of the credit/blame for. I even had a dealer offer me a plan by which he'd buy up quantities of some unwanted old comic and, when he had enough, I'd write some articles on how great it was and we'd create a demand and he'd cut me in. I said no, naturally. And I'm hesitant now about writing too much or speaking too loudly of the comics I do like, even if I own complete sets of them. I'm afraid others won't have the chance to pick them up cheap.

But that's what fandom has become: A money thing. Fanzines, such as they are, are published for money and much of what goes through them is too inextricably intertwined with the commerce of comics, themselves. Maybe it has to do with the quality of those comics; that's a whole other article. Maybe not. All I know is that the fun is gone. Something cannot be personal and profitable at the same time and fandom has gone the way of the latter.

Perhaps this is a maturation process. I'd like to think not. But, as I went through the aforesaid box of Stuff and looked at all those faded, dittoed zines and badly-mimeographed pages... as I paged through all that bad, bad writing that some of us who now make our living with words or pictures did then, this thought hit me, in fact, it just about flattened me. I figured: I've either got to open up a hell of blackmail business with this Stuff or I've got to tell everyone when fandom was personal.

You've just been told. And listen, friend: If you find something in comics that excites you, tell your fellow fans. Tell me. Tell everyone you can.

Just don't tell the dealers, huh?

peter pan

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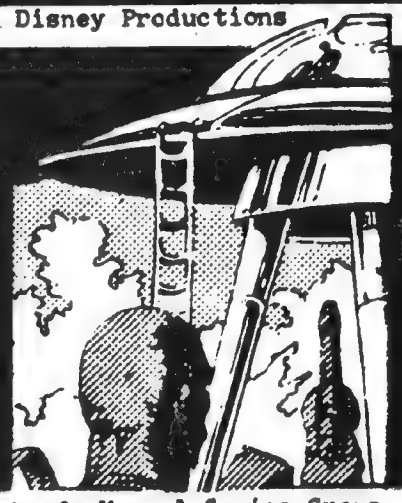

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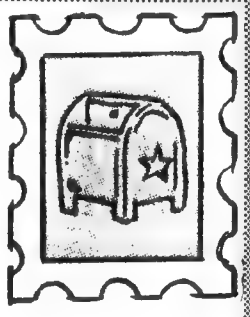
Don and Maggie Thompson have been part of nearly every aspect of comics fandom since its inception. Don works for the *CLEVELAND PRESS*, Maggie edits *FANTASY EMPIRE*, and they both write the *"Beautiful Balloons"* column in *THE BUYER'S GUIDE*.



DANGEROUS BUT INEPT:
STUPID SUPER-VILLAINS

by Don and Maggie Thompson

A man may be judged by the company he keeps, but a comic-book hero or heroine often is judged by the villains he or she fights.

Consider: Would Spider-Man have become a hit if, instead of battling Dr. Octopus, the Vulture and Electro, he had been forced to fight such costumed dregs as Porcupine, Leapfrog and the Unicorn? Those maladroit malefactors helped hold back Iron Man and Daredevil for years. It's hard to build a rep by fighting born losers, which these yutzes certainly are.

Perhaps, just perhaps, The She-Hulk might still have her own comic were she not pitted against villains who were boring (The Word) or simply silly (Man-Elephant).

If you are one of the 57 diehards who stayed with She-Hulk to (or near) the bitter end, you may remember The Word—he was an allegedly spellbinding preacher whose voice compelled listeners to obey. This is a really stupid thing to attempt in a print medium; there is no way to convey this without sound, so what you get is a villain who talks and talks and talks and...

In this respect, he is similar to Scorpio, a beer-swilling, self-pitying bore who drove throngs away from **THE DEFENDERS** by sitting around for what seemed dozens of issues, kvetching about being a failure and moaning on and on (while carefully displaying the brand of beer he was drinking in what looked to be a shameless try for payola, to say nothing of violating all sorts of codes and ethics about advertising beer in comic books).

It would seem that these two ear-benders will remain the most boring villains ever, unless their creator has some more waiting in the wings.

DC has pitted its heroes against some really idiotic baddies (Killer Moth, the Tattooed Man, the Turtle—these bozos are half a step below Ronald McDonald in the menace department).

As an aside, let us not forget the really badly conceived and horrendously rendered **heroes**—such as Marvel's Paladin (who is attired in the most wholeheartedly ugly costume devised—to date—an awful purple-and-green playsuit which looks as though it was washed in hot water along with a miscellany of non-colorfast clothing) and DC's Sandman (whose original outfit—a green suit, orange hat, yellow gas mask, etc.—had a certain polyglot charm but whose yellow-and-purple later outfit could not fairly be said to be an improvement; Wesley Dodds surely is colorblind).

This is not going to be a definitive list—we aren't going to scrape up a lot of one-shot villains only the longtime collectors could have heard of for two reasons: (1) It would be meaningless to newer readers and (2) we don't remember many of them; one of the hallmarks of a lousy villain in his forgettability—and who did Brother Power the Geek or the Green Team fight?

However, one group of stumblebums deserves special mention: The Ringmaster and his Circus of Crime.

Although they don't qualify for dumbest villain, where the competition is intense, these buffoons easily walk off with the award for biggest losers, about the only thing they could ever win.

Consider the facts. The group first showed up in an issue of **THE HULK** back in that six-issue run that preceded the successful soap-opera format the series eventually found. The Hulk clobbered them,

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS--WHAT DO THEY ALL MEAN? BY THEMSELVES--NOTHING!
ASSEMBLE THEM IN ONE ORDER AND YOU'RE A SHAKESPEARE, A STEINBECK, A PUZO!
BUT TAKE THOSE SAME WORDS AND JUMBLE THEM TOGETHER DIFFERENTLY--AND YOU'RE A BUM, A HACK, AN IDIOT!
WORDS HAVE NO MEANING! THEY ARE MERE TOOLS--TOOLS THAT I'LL USE TO GET ANYTHING, AND EVERYTHING, I WANT!
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The Word: "...an allegedly spell-binding preacher whose voice compelled listeners to obey. This is a really stupid thing to attempt in a print medium... what you get is a villain who talks and talks and talks and..."

but that's no disgrace; who can be expected to stand up against The Hulk, right? Then they took on Spider-Man who, with a helping hand from Daredevil, whipped them as well. Still, no real disgrace; it took two super-heroes to beat them. Later, the Clown deposed the Ringmaster and led the remainder of the group in still another foray against the laws of the land and, this time, Spidey wrapped them up all by himself. That's 0 for 3, but they weren't fighting at full strength with the Ringmaster sidelined, right? Excuses also can be made for a later bout with Thor, another too-tough customer.

OUTSIDE MOTH MANSION, SOON AFTERWARD...
NOW LET'S SINGE THAT KILLER MOTH WITH A FEW CHOICE PUNCHES!
IT'LL BE A PLEASURE, I "MOTH" SAY!
FROM ABOVE, KEEN EYES WATCH THE DYNAMIC DUO RACE INTO THE LEPIDOPTERAL LAIR...
I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW BATMAN AND ROBIN GOT INVOLVED IN THIS CAPER, BUT I'M READY FOR THEM WITH A TASTE OF MOTH HOSPITALITY!
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BATMAN villain Killer Moth: According to Don and Maggie Thompson, a "really idiotic baddie..."

However, that was just the start of the skids, a long, unbroken descent into loserdom that culminated with Howard the Duck pounding the poo out of the Ringmaster. We mean, that's **gotta** be rock bottom, getting beaten up by a duck!

Despite the fact that they should have been pensioned off or used strictly for comic relief after that fiasco, the Ringmaster and his Circus of Klutzes are still stumbling around, like boxers with jellied brains still looking for one more chance at the Big Time, occasionally trying (and, inevitably, failing) to bring off a successful fracturing of the law, in spite of the fact that they lack the luck required to get away with an overtime parking violation. Next thing, they'll try to snatch Aunt May's purse and she'll whop them all senseless with it.

*****

Is an inept, silly, clumsy, laughable villain doomed, then? Should he be scrapped and, as soon as the derisive hoots die down, forgotten? Is there no hope?

Oddly, there **is** hope. Some real losers have been redeemed, at least for an issue or so, by one or more of a variety of methods.

- You can team up a whole flock of these stumblers, as was done in Iron Man a couple of years ago, and hope that, as a mob, they can make up in sheer weight of numbers what they lack in power and skill. That turned out pretty well in that instance, even though Shellhead stacked 'em up like cordwood by the end of the fight.
- You can change their powers and perhaps their names. Paste-Pot Pete sounds like someone who couldn't survive a tussle with a small-town chapter of Kiwanis, let alone The Human Torch. But change his name to Trapster, widen his range of weapons

YES, YES... THAT WAS MY INTENTION.
BUT YOU'VE PROVED SUCH AN EXCELLENT DRAW, HOWARD!
THE CROWD LOVES YOU-- AND I LOVED THE CROWD.
SO I'M EXTENDING OUR AGREEMENT-- INDEFINITELY.

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The Ringmaster: He has faced everyone from the Hulk to Howard the Duck, and lost every time.

accordingly, and team him with other villains as The Frightful Four and you have an acceptable villain, if not a world-beater. The revised version of the Beetle taking on Spider-Man at this writing is at least an improvement over the fumble-fingered schlemiehl with the garbage can-lid wings who hit his nadir as one of the multitudes mashed by Iron Man in the above-mentioned sequence.

● You can acknowledge that he is a jerk and treat him accordingly, as was done hilariously when the Ringer [another of those clods the Defenders have been losing readership with] tackled Spider-Man, who treated him as a joke—we mean, jeez, a guy who makes rings out of the air and tosses them at his opponents?!? Come **on**!—and playfully whipped him in half an hour—including two costume changes and traveling time.

● You can kill him off. DC recently did this with the Tattooed Man in **GREEN LANTERN**. There have been other such mercy killings, but, due to their inherent lack of impact while alive, their deaths have been little noted and briefly remembered here.

● You can make him a great villain, as was done with the previously uninspired Bullseye [and, yes, Kingpin, who never lived up to the press-agentry of his captions when he was touted as one of Spider-Man's leading foes] when Frank Miller took over Daredevil. This method will never become commonplace; it takes a great deal of talent to bring this off. But, if Chris Claremont can make a good villain out of Magneto, there may still be hope for the Ringmaster and his shopworn Circus of Crime.

Say! Whatever happened to the Hellgrammite?

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"Justice Will Be Done"
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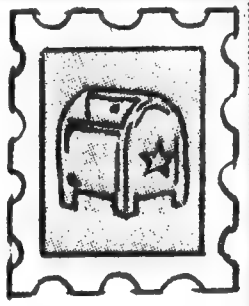
Chuck Huber is a graduate of the University of Illinois with a B.A. in Chemistry. He has also attended the MIT Ph.D. program.



WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

by Chuck Huber

The comics have never been an ethically neutral medium. From the prestigious "advisory boards" which DC Comics assembled to impress dubious parents in the 1940s, to the formation of the Comics Code Authority in the 1950s, to the present, there has been concern about how the contents of the funny books would influence young minds. Of course, the nature of the moral and ethical emphasis has shifted over the years. The limits on the portrayal of sex and violence have loosened, while the limits on racism and sexism have tightened. Super-heroes especially are considered to be role models of young readers, and so are expected to live up to high standards of behavior. The controversies surrounding the Fleisher Spectre and the death of Jean Grey are proof that the issues are real. I've grown concerned over the comics' handling of some new ethical issues—specifically those arising out of bio-technology. While the comics have generally done a good job of treating all men as brothers in recent years, even treating aliens and mutants as real persons, I feel they have at best done a mixed job of handling the question of artificial life: clones, androids, and robots. Admittedly, the day of cloning human beings is still a ways off, and I don't think that anyone is ready to predict the date of the creation of the first sentient, self-aware electronic device, yet the first stirrings of the new bio-technology are having an impact on public policy, and so it is time to treat the ethics of the situation seriously.

Created intelligent life is not a new theme in literature. While Mary Shelley's **FRANKENSTEIN** didn't exactly deal with a clone, it did set a pattern. Sentient robots also antedate the comics. Lester del Rey created "Helen O'Loy" in 1938, a tale of a sentient robot in the form of a female human, who was so life-like that one of her creators fell in love with her, married her and eventually forgot that she was a robot. In the end, when the man died, Helen had herself destroyed by the one other man who knew her secret, to preserve the illusion of life. Isaac Asimov is probably the most famous creator of robots, beginning with Robbie of **"Strange Playfellow"** in 1940. Many of Asimov's robots, especially the incomparable robot detective, R. Daneel Olivaw [**THE CAVES OF STEEL** (1953) and **THE NAKED SUN** (1956)], seem very human. But the humans who interact with Asimov's robots, such as roboticist Susan Calvin and detective Elijah Baley, usually have mixed attitudes toward the robots—they often receive respect, even love, but are never quite treated as fully human. Perhaps it can be said that the most life-like of Asimov's robots achieve the status of beloved pets. It is also true that it is never clear whether Asimov's robots manage to transcend their programming to become truly sentient. Certainly they never escape the Three Laws of Robotics, which commit a robot to protect and obey humans above all else. The one intriguing exception to this occurs in Asimov's "ultimate" robot tale, **"That Thou Art Mindful of Him!"** (1974). In this case, the JG or "George" series of robots was created to have a faculty of judgment: to be able to distinguish between the "value" of one human and another. So equipped, at the end of the story, they decide that **they** are the "humans" most worthy of protection and obedience—and so much supplant flesh-and-blood humanity. There are numerous other sentient robots in science fiction as well, not to mention the sentient computers ranging from the beneficent and lovable Mycroft Holmes of **THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS** by Heinlein to the malevolent torturer in Ellison's **"I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream."**

The comics haven't had quite as great a variety, but they were in the artificial life business even

before Asimov. The being in question is, of course, the original Human Torch. In his debut in **MARVEL COMICS #1**, The Torch was an android created by one Professor Horton (a genius ahead of his time if ever there was one). One wonders what might have become of this being if he hadn't had the curious flaw of spontaneously bursting into flame (without being consumed) on exposure to air? The Torch was in fact treated by his creator as just another failed experiment and sealed away in concrete. The Torch's relevance to the question of the treatment of artificial life in the comics fades away quickly after the first issue or so, because the human population and even The Torch himself seemed to quickly forget that the Master of Flame wasn't made of flesh and blood. Indeed, at one point, The Torch is called upon to give a "blood" transfusion to his young aide, Toro, without any comment whatsoever that it might be unusual for an android to do so. The Torch was treated more fully as an android in the revisionist version of Marvel's Golden Age presented by Roy Thomas in **THE INVADERS.** In keeping with the original portrayal, The Torch displays a full range of human emotions, and is treated as a full equal by his teammates, not to mention the filial love and respect of Toro for his "Pappy." However, when The Torch developed his brief crush on Jacqueline (Spitfire) Falsworth, he did assume that her preference for Captain America was motivated by the fact that he was not a "real" human. The only other sentient machine to confront The Invaders was Prof. Horton's other creation, Adam-II, in **WHAT IF? #4**. The accidental destruction of the evil android enabled The Torch and his teammates to evade the question of what they would have done with a malign pile of plastic whose claim to existence was as good as that of "Jim Hamond."

Infant genius Bernie the Brain, explaining how useful artificial life is.

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For many years after The Human Torch, there were no new notable additions to the ranks. Robotman, in both his incarnations, was actually a cyborg rather than a true artificial man. While there were stories in which humanity at large was shown to have doubts about the humanity of these combinations of brains and batteries, there was never any question that the protagonists of the stories (and therefore the readers) regarded the Robotmen as truly human. It wasn't until about 1961 that the most prolific manufacturer of intelligent robots got into the act—Superman. The Superman robots were useful devices for the Man of Steel. They could handle emergencies while he was busy elsewhere; they could serve as reinforcements in the case of really dangerous menaces; they could deal with Kryptonite for him; and best of all, they time and again helped Supes protect his secret identity. Of course to do all this, the robots had to have very sophisticated programming. Indeed, they had to almost (?) be able to think for themselves. By the time of **ACTION #274** (**"The Reversed Super-Powers"**), Superman had at least 26 robots (designated A through Z) and at least one of these robots was capable of incredibly sophisticated behavior. In that story, Robot Z, having observed his master's romance with Lois Lane, decided that the snoopy reporter was not worthy of Kal-El's love. To test the assumption that Lois loved Supes only for his powers, the robot first impersonated Superman well enough to fool Lois Lane, then devised a serum to give her temporary super-powers. At the end of the story, the real Superman shows up just as the robot is "dying," reassures Lois that she really is the one for him, and announces that he's taking Robot Z back to the Fortress for reprogramming. In **LOIS LANE #30**, there is a still more incredible example. In the story, a nearly-destroyed Superman robot is rebuilt by a mermaid scientist from another world, who subsequently dies. The robot, desiring an independent existence, builds himself a robot wife in the image of his mermaid savior, and a robot child to complete the family. At story's end, when the real Superman shows up, the robot asks whether Superman will take him back to Earth for reprogramming. The soft-hearted Man of Steel replies that he'd never break up such a happy family, and he and Lois exit.

This story demonstrates what was a fairly consistent pattern in the early Superman-robot stories. Superman is generally rather compassionate and humane to those of his robots who go off on their own, and doesn't treat them like dirt. However, he seems blind to the ethical implications of creating what amounts to a race of personal slaves. If the robot in **LL #30** is capable of independent life, aren't all his robots? And if so, what is he doing keeping them locked up in a closet to await his beck and call? In **ACTION #277** (**"The Conquest of Superman"**), we are told that Superman gives

each new robot a test to determine whether it is fit to fully join the elite ranks. Left undiscussed is the hidden question of what Superman does with the robots who flunk the test. Do they simply go back in the shop for a little retooling, or does he scrap an independent, thinking, if flawed, being?? It's not that Superman is cruel, just that he seems rather unthinking. If one counts in all the stories with Superboy robots displaying sentience, the Man of Steel apparently went for years and years, building his thinking slaves, and only on very special occasions actually thinking about them as independent beings or shedding a tear for them when they were destroyed. One such occasion is **SUPERMAN #174**, wherein he decides that more realistic replicas would be useful. Therefore, he sets out to create a super-android. The android malfunctions and is apparently destroyed, but in fact it survives, and decides to take Superman's place. However, the android's sense of duty is greater than his sense of self-preservation, and he sacrifices his life to save Metropolis from a runaway power plant. Superman is too late to save the android, but he does build a monument to his heroic creation.

The Man of Steel is hardly alone in his ambivalent attitude toward robots and androids. And there is no question that it is a difficult question. On the one hand, there is a natural tendency to treat something that looks and acts human as human. Yet trying to separate the true sentient robots from their kin, the non-sentient computers, isn't always easy. One cannot have all the characters afflicted with remorse every time a pocket calculator gets smashed.

Certainly, one super-hero who never did waste any remorse on any creature of gears and wires was the Champion of North Am, Magnus, Robot Fighter. Here's a character who made a career of trashing sentient robots, and a close analysis of the situation reveals very few excuses for what he did. Did Magnus perhaps believe that robots couldn't really be alive, and therefore he was only trashing inanimate objects? No, because in his first issue, Magnus himself refers to his robot mentor, A1, as follows: "He is so human and wise that I think of him as he, not it or a machine!" Clearly, he recognizes that robots are **capable** of sentience, yet he destroys sentient, evil robot H8. Perhaps then, he only destroys the evil robots because nothing else could be done with them. This assumes that the good citizens of North Am would cavil at reprogramming a living being. But in issue **#2**, our hero captures the evil **human** called Mekman, and comments: "With psycho care we could change his social behavior pattern so that he will work for the **good** of mankind." The only conclusion one can draw is that Magnus didn't object to killing intelligent beings, but that robots make a more satisfying crunch under his "steel-smashing" blows than humans do.

Occasionally, an attempt has been made to draw a distinction between the run-of-the-mill robots and the ones who are truly self-aware. For instance, when The Metal Men debuted in **SHOWCASE #37**, it was clear that Doc Magnus did not expect to get the emotional, independent-minded beings that he produced. Moreover, in **#38**, Magnus learns that the original Metal Men were the product of a unique accident—his attempt to create some new Metal Men is a failure and he must "resuscitate" the original team. However, the fine distinction was lost over the years as the stories become more comedic and Doc Magnus created lots and lots of robots apparently equal to the original team [**BRAVE & BOLD #55, METAL MEN #31** and many others.]

At Marvel, generally there's been a pretty clear distinction between the two types of robot. The first

YOU'RE WRONG, CHIEF! I *HAVE* FOUND PEACE!
AHHHH! SO YOU'RE AMONG US AGAIN! AND WHAT FORM DOES THIS PEACE TAKE ?
A HARMONY WITH *ALL* LIVING THINGS!

Although Robotman of the Doom Patrol had a metal body, he had a human brain—transplanted after an accident—and retained his human emotions.

such creation in the Marvel Age proper was the so-called Awesome Android of the Mad Thinker [**FANTASTIC FOUR #15**], which never displayed any sentience until its recent appearance in **ROM #14**. The first to display the capability of independent action was the Master Mold, leader of the Sentinels [**X-MEN #14-16**]. The Master Mold clearly rebelled against the orders and programming of its creator, Bolivar Trask. The other Sentinels seemed to be more strictly bound by their programming, and so their destruction by The X-Men doesn't seem offensive. The Master Mold himself was destroyed by Bolivar Trask, who committed suicide to do so. Trask was obviously in a state of mind where he would done the same to a human being, so it's

BUT MUCH MORE THAN THAT, I LOVE YOU AS A WOMAN, BECAUSE I AM FINALLY FULLY AWARE OF MYSELF AS A MAN.
I AM NO LONGER A MYSTERIOUS SYNTHEZOID OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN. NOW I KNOW ALL OF MY LIFE, AND THAT I WAS CREATED TO BE HUMAN, BY A HUMAN FATHER.
NOW I CAN BE YOUR MAN FOR ALL MY SYNTHETIC FLESH.
I KNOW YOU CAN.
DON'T YOU SEE, LOVE IS FOR SOULS, NOT SOPHES?
YES, VISION--
--YES, I'LL MARRY YOU!
YOU--YOU MEAN YOU-- THAT IS WE-- YOU AND ME---
NOW DON'T GO HUMAN ON ME ALL AT ONCE, DARLING! STAMMERING'S NOT YOUR STYLE!
I MEAN YES! YES!! YES!
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The Vision has his revelation: His flesh may be synthetic, but he was given human emotions and —most important—he has a soul.

not a case of denigration of robotic life. In any case, Trask was not one of the protagonists of the story —it is not a matter of concern if a "villain" does something wrong; that's their job.

In the second appearance of the Sentinels [**X-MEN #57-59**], none of the big purple robots seems truly self-aware. Granted, they disobey Larry Trask, but it is in strict obedience to their programming and the logical extrapolation thereof. In the third appearance [**AVENGERS #102-104**], again, most of the Sentinels are mere mechanisms —except for the mutated Number Two, who asserts his humanity, but is then destroyed for being a mutant by his fellow Sentinels, who are bound to their programming. Subsequent appearances [**X-MEN #98-100, 140-141**] have depicted at most a very few Sentinels capable of more than programmed responses.

In general, super-heroes have not been too kind to their robotic foes even when they are clearly sentient beings. Among the most prominent cases are the semi-sentient Dragon Man and Shaggy Man, the power-mimics Amazo and the Super-Adaptoid, and the arch-villains Brainiac and Ultron. Brainiac is the oldest of the group [**ACTION #242**], but we didn't learn that he was a computer until **SUPERMAN #167**, and the Man of Steel didn't find out until **JIMMY OLSEN #87**. Surprisingly enough, with the exception of a Jimmy Olsen story [which, alas, I've lost the reference to] where the Kandorians disassembled their arch-enemy, Superman has generally continued to treat Brainiac with the same respect that he accords to all his foes. Granted that Brainiac's intellect and force-field usually enable him to escape capture, this is still significant.

Amazo, who debuted in **BRAVE & BOLD #30**, has not fared so well. Despite the fact that he has definitely shown capacity for independent action, at least in his more recent appearances, the Justice Leaguers have treated him as, at best, a nice trophy for display at the HQ. Most recently, in **JLA #191**, an all-but-defeated Amazo was needlessly smashed by Black Canary, and his lifeless remains were subsequently dumped unceremoniously into orbit. The Shaggy Man, too, has primarily been considered a trophy, though somewhat more excusably, since the furry android is more akin to a rampaging animal than a thinking human. Still, one would expect the JLAers to have more pity on a dumb animal than to simply launch him into space on the outside of a rocket as in the recent **JLA #186**. One especially wonders about Superman in this case. The Shaggy Man is not inherently evil, and his ability to endlessly regenerate would seem a very life-like characteristic. Yet Superman, who has carried his vow never to take a life to vast extremes in protecting various alien beasties over the years, is perfectly willing to try to tear Shaggy Man to pieces [**JLA #104**].

For some reason, the mechanical villains at Marvel seem to come in for less deliberate destruction than their DC counterparts. The Super-Adaptoid has usually fallen to his own powers turned against

him [**X-MEN #29, AVENGERS #45, CAPTAIN MARVEL #50, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #75**] rather than by deliberate attempts at total destruction by the super-heroes. Dragon Man has more often "perished" through attempts at freeing himself from his current master [**FF #35 & 135, CAPTAIN AMERICA #249**] than through attempts to destroy him by unthinking foes [Hercules in **AVENGERS #142**, Prince Namor in **SUB-MARINER #15**]. Even Ultron has more often been demolished inadvertently, or by his own hand [**AVENGERS #57 & 68, FF #150**], than by the Avengers. One can sympathize a bit with The Avengers, for wanting to destroy Ultron—he is nearly invulnerable, as physically strong as Thor, and able to hurl devastating power blasts. The Avengers can't simply strip him of his powers, as Green Lantern has done with Amazo at times, and the leering robot has so far shown no goals in his existence except the destruction of Henry Pym and The Avengers, and a perverse desire for a family. However, it's interesting that even The Vision and Jocasta feel no qualms about seeking to destroy their mechanical "father."

The two Avenging Androids are probably the best examples of artificial humanity treated with some degree of sensitivity, thereby standing in direct opposition to that most mistreated of beings, the Red Tornado. From their respective beginnings, the Vision and the Red Tornado were treated differently by their teammates. After all, where Ultron intended for the Vision to destroy the Avengers with his power [**AVENGERS #57**], T.O. Morrow intended for the Red Tornado to destroy the Justice Society with ineptitude [**JLA #64**]. Still, other factors besides simple prejudice against artificial life can be found. The Avengers had always held a place for outcasts from the Hulk onward [as per Henry Pym's moving speech to the Vision in AVENGERS #58], where the JSA and JLA had more of an elitist air [until comparatively recently]. There is also persuasive external logic behind the different treatment of the characters—The Vision was an immediate hit with the fans, and was a favorite of writer Roy Thomas. The Red Tornado didn't catch on in the same way, and so never received the extensive starring treatment that The Vision has.

Nonetheless, the occasions where the writers on each book have chosen to make a direct statement on the issue still display very different attitudes. Since his last revival [by Steve Englehart in **JLA #146**], the Red Tornado has been treated to some degree of humanization, mainly through his association with Kathy Sutton, and the orphan, Traya. In their appearances in **JLA** and the Red Tornado solo strip in **WORLD'S FINEST**, these two characters have treated "John Smith" with the dignity due a living being. But how much louder actions speak than words! In **JUSTICE LEAGUE #192**, a phony Red Tornado attacks the JLA. Moments later, the ersatz android is subdued by Superman. But then, with a comment about how tricky the android can be, The Flash races over to the helpless android and rips its arms and legs and head off! Consider: At this point, JLAers assume that their foe **is** the **real** Red Tornado, though perhaps under the control of some villain. Moreover, the Flash and the rest are aware that their mechanical fellow member can feel pain. In fact, The Flash's action ranks for dispassionate cruelty with the immortal Spectre-dissects-his-girlfriend-with-a-cleaver scene. Adding infamy to it all is the fact that not a single one of the other Justice Leaguers actually protests this action, though Firestorm is grossed out by the spectacle. This is ghastly! The readers' reaction to events in a story is heavily conditioned by the reactions of the protagonists—the "heroes"—of the story. One scene with the entire JLA treating [apparently] the Red Tornado like a malfunctioning vacuum cleaner effectively wipes out any number of touching scenes of "John" and his little family.

On the other hand, even when the Avengers have shown disregard for The Vision at one time or another, the Avenger in question has been reprimanded by another teammate. For instance, Quicksilver's reaction to the android [which was more complicated than a simple dislike of artificial life] was consistently shown to be **wrong** by his teammates. And in the "origin" of Jocasta in **AVENGERS #162**, Iron Man threatens to destroy Jocasta in order to save the life of Janet Pym from Ultron. At that point, The Avengers don't yet know that she is a truly sentient robot, and the situation is desperate, yet The Black Panther questions Iron Man's use of the threat. The two most important events in the treatment of the androids were **AVENGERS #113** [**"Your Young Men Shall Slay Visions"**] and **GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4**, both by Steve Englehart. In the former tale, the issue of artificial humanity is confronted directly. The love affair between The Vision and the Scarlet Witch is revealed to the world, and in reaction, a group of fanatics, the Living Bombs, resolve to destroy the android at the cost of their own lives. Interestingly, the villains of the story are depicted as a cross-section of the American people—united against a common enemy to mankind in their opinion. Yet the story makes it emphatically clear, through the actions of all The Avengers, that their point of view is **wrong**, that The Vision is truly a man, even if his flesh is plastic. Still more important was the marriage of The Vision and The Scarlet Witch. Englehart had elaborately developed the relationship, and used the long "real origin of The Vision" sequence to bring both Wanda and the Vision to the point where they could take such a daring step, and this story was the payoff. But most interesting to me was a more subtle

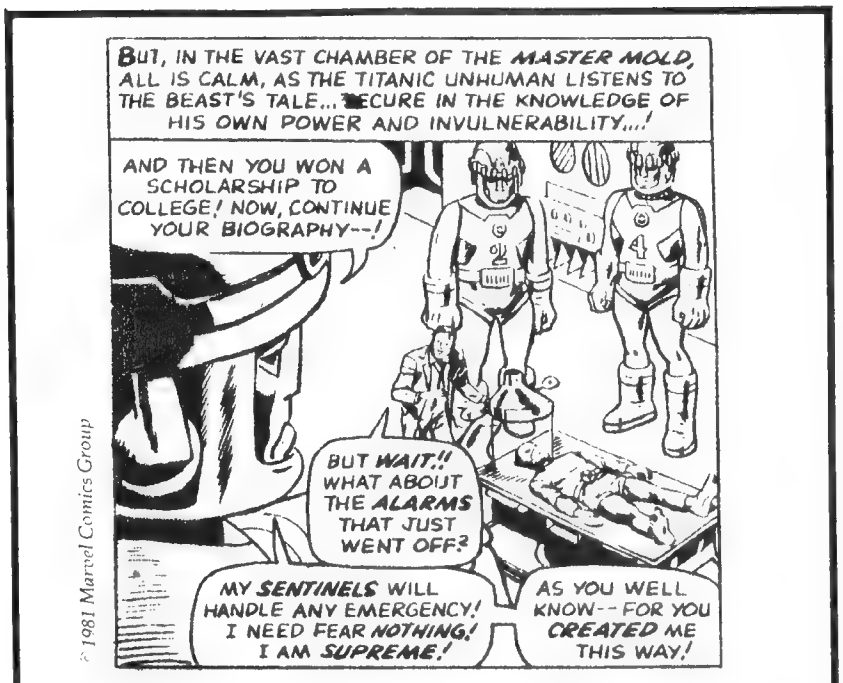
point. Englehart had touched on the theological implications of the Vision's existence in #113, in a scene with Captain America reacting to a scrawled hate letter from a self-styled "religious" man. But in a single caption in **GIANT-SIZE #4** Englehart makes his point: captured by Dormammu, the Scarlet Witch lets out a psychic cry for help, which the Vision hears—because he has a soul. Regardless of what one's own beliefs may be, in the Marvel Universe, living beings have souls [see numerous issues of the **SILVER SURFER**, **DOCTOR STRANGE**, etc.] and so for The Vision to be a true human in a plastic body, this was a statement which had to be made somewhere, and it was done appropriately.

Since the departure of Steve Englehart from comics, some good points have been made in **THE AVENGERS** by Jim Shooter [most notably #162 mentioned above, and the resolution of the Vision-Wonder Man-Grim Reaper relationship in #160's **"The Trial"**]. But my highest kudos in recent comics would go to Bill Mantlo and Archie Goodwin, for their treatment of the androids in Marvel's licensed superstars, **MICRONAUTS** and **STAR WARS**. Always and everywhere, the mechanical co-stars of the two books are treated by the protagonists as full equals. My highest award goes to Archie, however, for a scene in **STAR WARS #24**. In this flashback tale, Obi-Wan Kenobi is riding a spaceliner when one of his fellow passengers asks the Jedi Knight whether a droid standing nearby belongs to him. Quoth the servant of the Force, "I don't own living beings." Bravo, General Kenobi. Bravo, Archie Goodwin.

Now I admit that the treatment of robots and androids as fully human is a debatable point. While I come down strongly on the pro-synthetics side of the questions, I don't really object if a comics writer

I'VE NEVER OWNED A LIVING CREATURE IN MY LIFE, AND I DON'T INTEND TO START NOW, BUT IF IT'S A TRAVELLING COMPANION YOU WANT, YOU'RE WELCOME TO SHARE MY CABIN.
HEY! WHAT'S THAT THING DOING IN HERE?
© 1981 Marvel Comics Group

Obi-Wan Kenobi: "Always and everywhere, the mechanical co-stars... are treated by the protagonists as full equals."


BUT, IN THE VAST CHAMBER OF THE MASTER MOLD, ALL IS CALM, AS THE TITANIC UNHUMAN LISTENS TO THE BEAST'S TALE... SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS OWN POWER AND INVULNERABILITY....!
AND THEN YOU WON A SCHOLARSHIP TO COLLEGE! NOW, CONTINUE YOUR BIOGRAPHY--!
BUT WAIT!! WHAT ABOUT THE ALARMS THAT JUST WENT OFF?
MY SENTINELS WILL HANDLE ANY EMERGENCY! I NEED FEAR NOTHING! I AM SUPREME!
AS YOU WELL KNOW--FOR YOU CREATED ME THIS WAY!
© 1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Sentinels: Artificial life created to seek and destroy superior life.

chooses to take the other, so long as it is treated as a real issue, and not with throwaway callousness, and so long as it does not tread on existing relationships. But in the case of clones, and the products of DNA manipulations, there I object always and everywhere to treating them like dirt. While clones and their ilk have not been as ubiquitous as sentient robots in the comics, they have been treated badly an even higher percentage of the time.

One of the more notorious uses of cloning was the sequence with Gwen Stacy and Peter Parker clones in **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN**. Actually, I think the science of the story was more despicable than the morality. It is very true that the Gwen clone was treated very badly [for the sake of expediency in the storyline] but Peter Parker was not depicted as treating her as sub-human—rather he simply treated her in the same shabby inconsiderate fashion that has been lavished on Debra Whitman in more recent months. The real fault of the story is that the clones were created, and in "Gwen" 's case, turned loose in the world, without any thought for the possible consequences.

It seems as though super-villains go in for most of the clone-development work. The "son" of Doctor Doom, revealed to be a clone and slain in **FF #199**, was actually treated fairly well in the sense of recognition of his humanity. It was clear that Doom had thought of him as a true "son," and if he was a pawn of the Doctor, it was only in the sense that Doom makes pawns of all his servants. And when Doom killed the clone, both he and the FF reacted as though he'd murdered a human being—quite properly. On the other hand, the genetic tinkering of Lex Luthor has gotten much shorter shrift. In **ACTION #500**, Luthor created a Superman clone, with an eye toward using him to replace the original

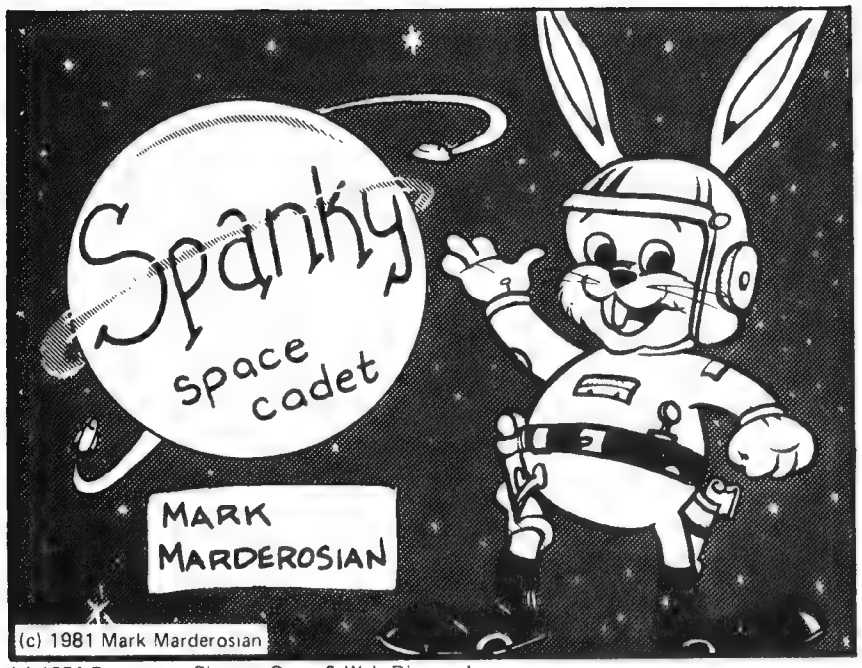
SUDDENLY, FROM THE OPENED BAG...
IT'S AN ARMY... OF MINI-ME'S!
LOIS LANE... THIS IS A RECORDING! THE PROJECT HAS FASHIONED MINATURE LOIS LANES OUT OF THE TISSUE YOU DONATED TO OUR CELLBANK... UNIQUELY DESIGNED TO BATTLE ANY CONCEIVABLE THREAT AGAINST YOU!
©1981 DC Comics

Robert Kanigher's squad of six-inch Lois Lanes: "The most ludicrous example of the callous manipulation of human life... What happened to them afterwards—were they each married off to a spare six-inch Superman, or just tossed into the protein vats?"

Man of Steel. Villains are entitled to be villains, of course, but it is the reaction of Superman which is distressing. At the end of the story, Superman attacks the clone, and before he knows what is happening, hurls him into contact with Gold Kryptonite, thereby destroying the clone's powers and ending the problem. Now, wait a minute! At story's end, there is still a fully functional, albeit powerless, duplicate of Kal-El—one who fully believes himself to be Superman/Clark Kent, differing only in his attitude toward Luthor...and we have no idea what became of him! Did Superman lock him up in a cell in the Fortress? Project him into the Phantom Zone? Give him to Lana Lang as a birthday present?? Probably the closest thing to a humane solution would be to take him to the new home of Kandor... but even then the clone is bound to undergo considerable psychological torment. There is the meat of good stories here; after all, this is, in effect, Superman himself, stripped of powers and identity. This is the stuff of classic Imaginary Stories, but it has really taken place. Similarly, in **ACTION #512**, Luthor creates a clone of one Angela Blake [after callously slaying the original] solely for the purpose of destroying Superman. At story's end, she is hurled in an anti-matter dimension, but does Superman make any attempt to rescue her? No. So far as we know, she is still floating in a solitary limbo. I hate to think that the Man of Steel is so unthinkingly cruel, yet it seems that Cary Bates gives little thought to loose ends, even when they are human lives.

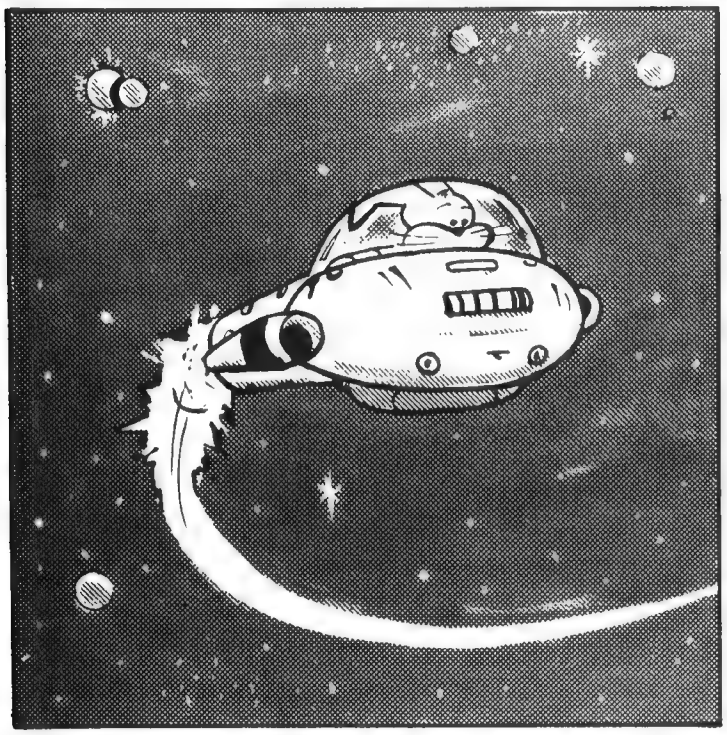
By far though, the most shocking examples of amoral playing with human lives appeared in the tales of the DNA project in Jack Kirby's **JIMMY OLSEN** stories. The nadir of the series was in **JIMMY OLSEN #136**. Having already been introduced to the Hairies, a group of highly intelligent human offshoots, and to the Guardian, a clone of the late Jim Harper, we now meet squads of "Scrapper-troopers," "Gabby" communications officers, and endless number of all different sizes of Jimmy Olsens and Supermen. Now, the Hairies, Guardian and the alien-looking Dubbilex were all handled with some dignity, and none of the individual "carbon-copies" were treated inhumanely. Here, it's the very **concept** of what the Project is up to that is revolting. What gives them the right to churn out vast numbers of human beings designed for a particular role—effectively lifetime slaves of the Project?? Did they ever bother showing Superman and Jimmy the ovens where they disposed of the inevitable failed experiments, perhaps?? What happens if the Project gets shut down—do all the Scrappers and Gabbys and Olsens just get hauled off to a landfill or do they move in with the original models and take turns going to the Daily Planet?? The most ludicrous example of the callous manipulation of human life wasn't Jack Kirby's fault though. That appeared in **LOIS LANE #111**, where Robert Kanigher had the Project create a whole squad of six-inch high Loises on short notice for the express purpose of rescuing her from an evil six-inch high Justice League! What became of them afterwards—were they each married off to a spare six-inch Superman, or just tossed into the protein vats?

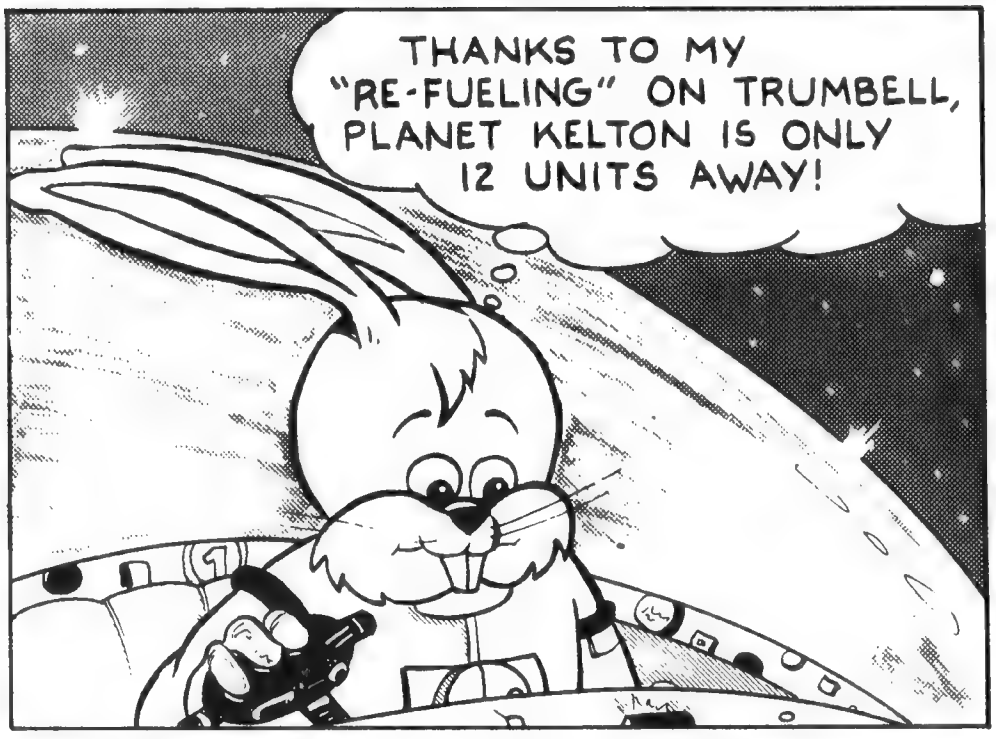
I really don't think it's necessary to write something into the Comics Code, but if comics writers are obligated to consider the ethical implications of divorce, drugs, violence, sex and so forth, is it too much to ask that they give serious thought to how they treat the tricky questions of the very nature of human life?

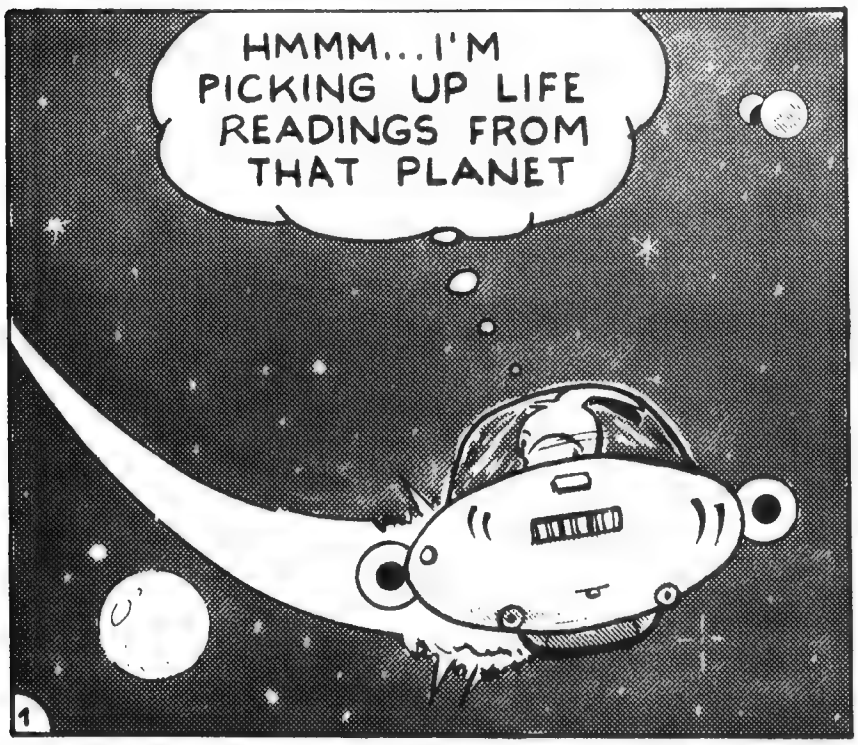


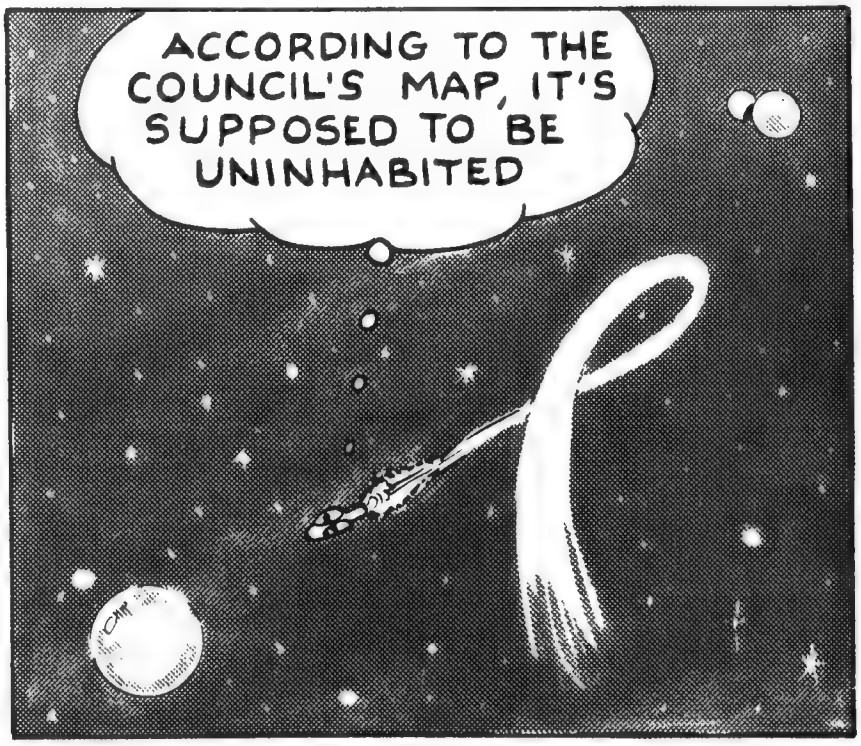
"JOURNEY TO KELTON"
EPISODE 2
THE EARTH'S ENERGY CRYSTALS HAVE BECOME DEPLETED. SPACE HERO SPANKY IS RACING ACROSS THE GALAXY TO THE PLANET KELTON FOR MORE, UNAWARE OF THE MANY DANGERS AWAITING HIM

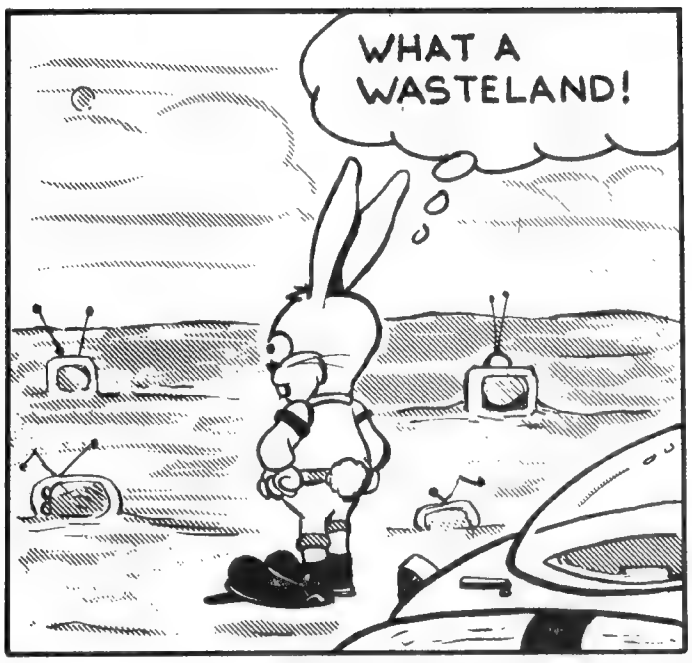
(c) 1981 Paramount Pictures Corp. & Walt Disney, Inc.



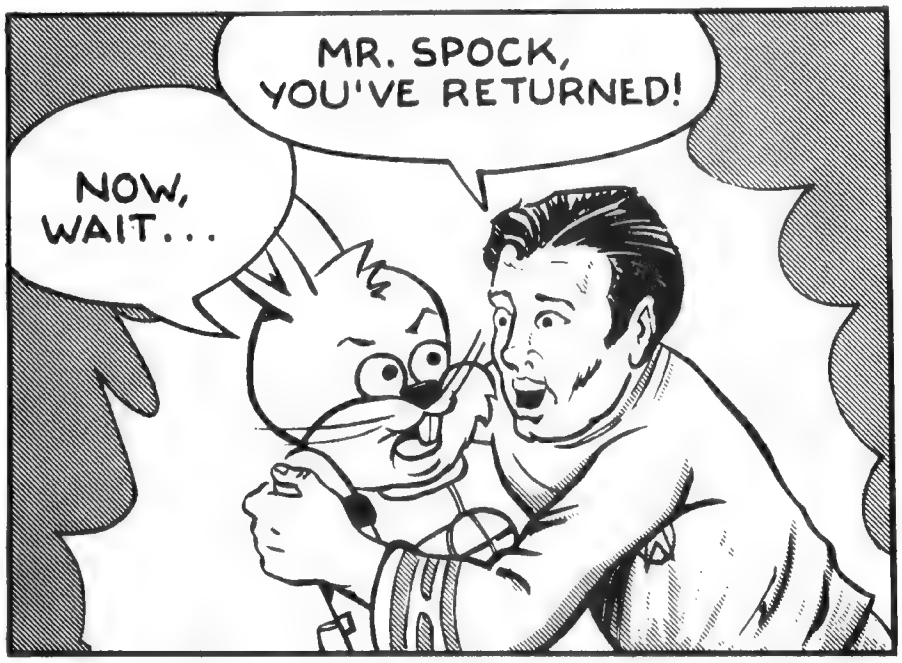


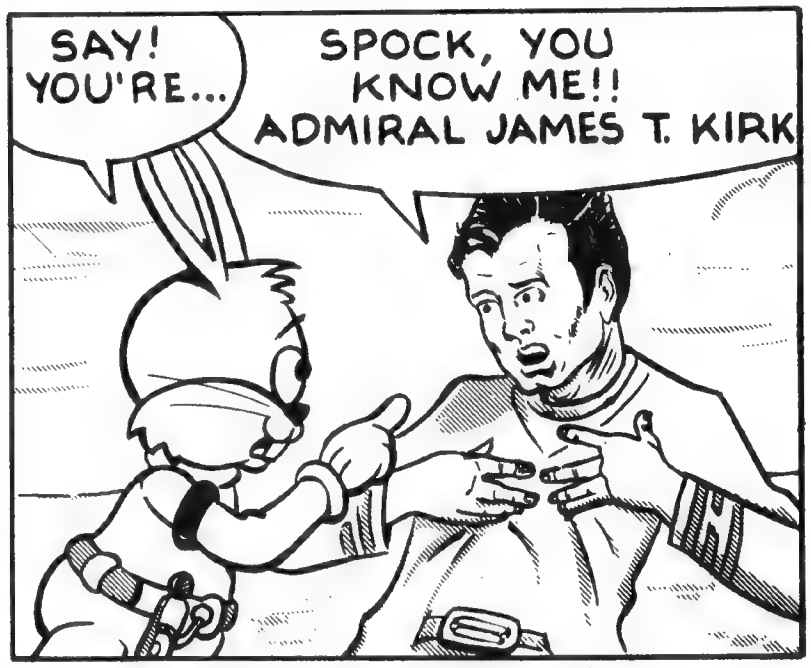


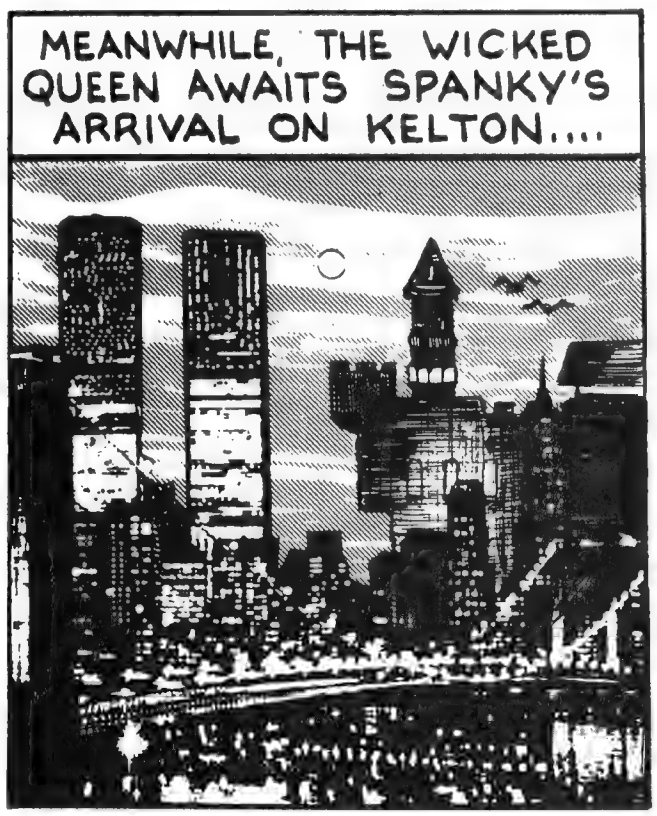



WHAT A WASTELAND!

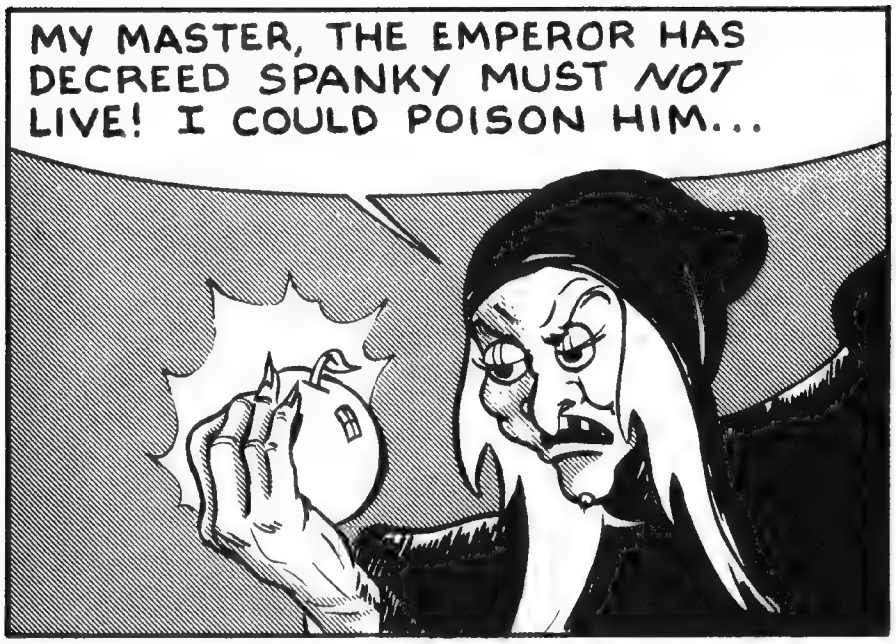
THOSE EARS! I KNEW YOU'D COME BACK!
WHA-?!


NOW, WAIT...
MR. SPOCK, YOU'VE RETURNED!


SAY! YOU'RE...
SPOCK, YOU KNOW ME!! ADMIRAL JAMES T. KIRK

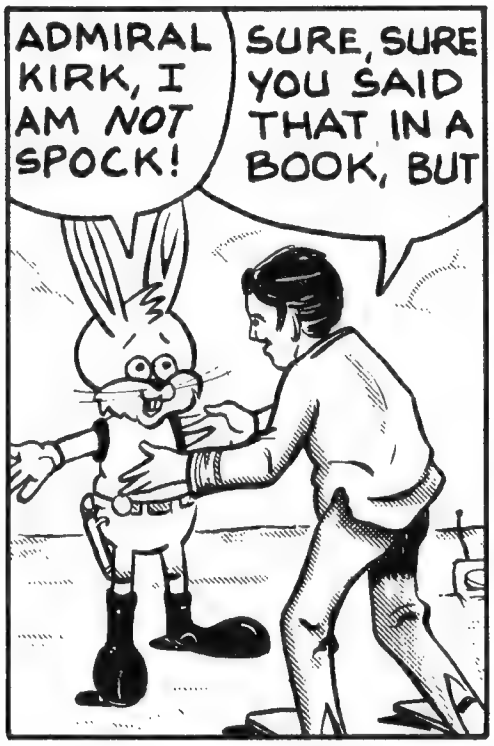

MEANWHILE, THE WICKED QUEEN AWAITS SPANKY'S ARRIVAL ON KELTON....

SOME CASTLE THIS IS! I BUY IT CHEAP 'CAUSE THE LAST WITCH GOT LIQUIDATED. BUT I GET STUCK WITH ALL THESE FLYING MONKEYS!
BOOT!
GET OUT!
2

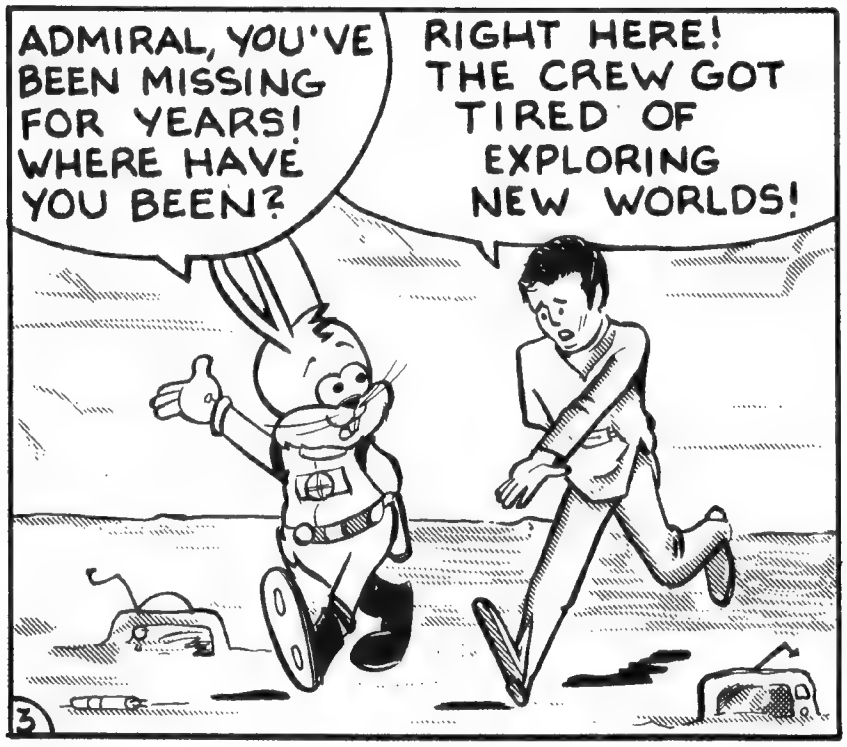

MY MASTER, THE EMPEROR HAS DECREED SPANKY MUST *NOT* LIVE! I COULD POISON HIM...

BUT I'LL HAVE THE HELP HANDLE HIM! THE TWO DEADLIEST ASSASSINS IN THE GALAXY...

JUTT AND MEFF!
READY TO RECEIVE YOUR COMMAND!

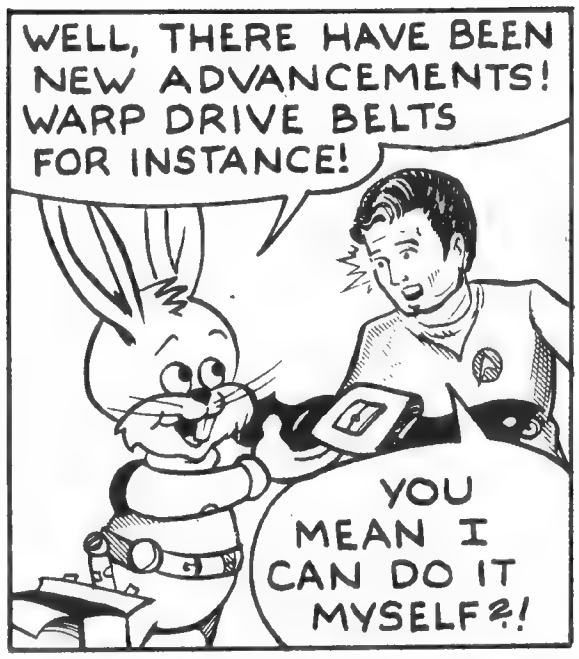

ADMIRAL KIRK, I AM *NOT* SPOCK!
SURE, SURE YOU SAID THAT IN A BOOK, BUT

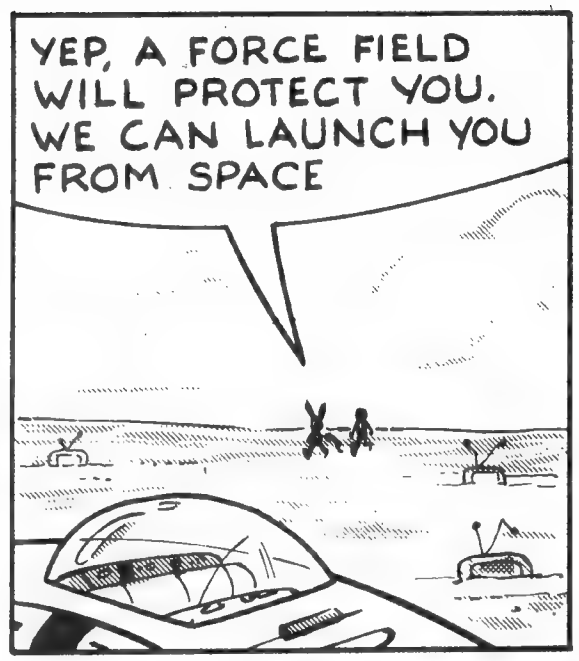
BUT, I'M A RABBIT!
OH..! YEAH..

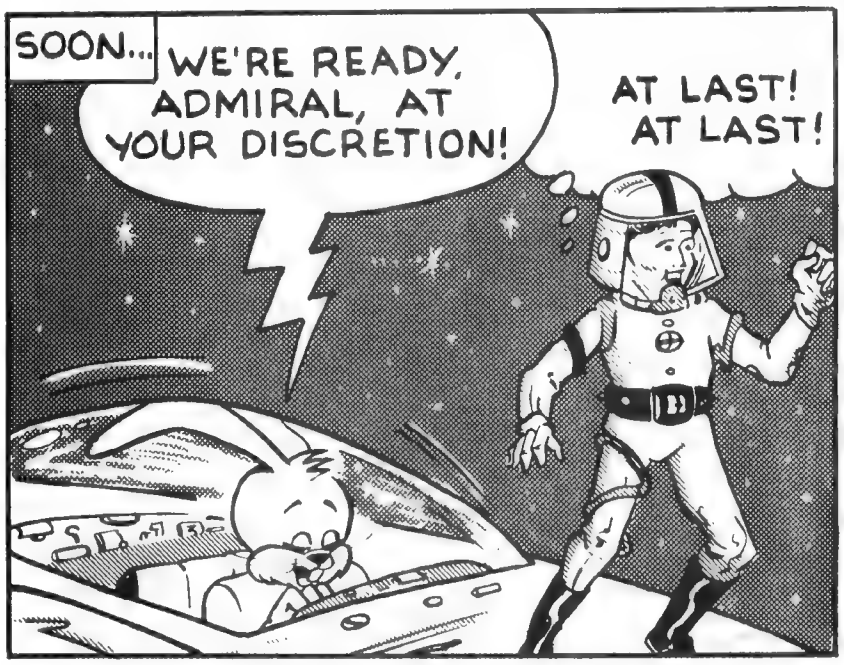

ADMIRAL, YOU'VE BEEN MISSING FOR YEARS! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
RIGHT HERE! THE CREW GOT TIRED OF EXPLORING NEW WORLDS!
3

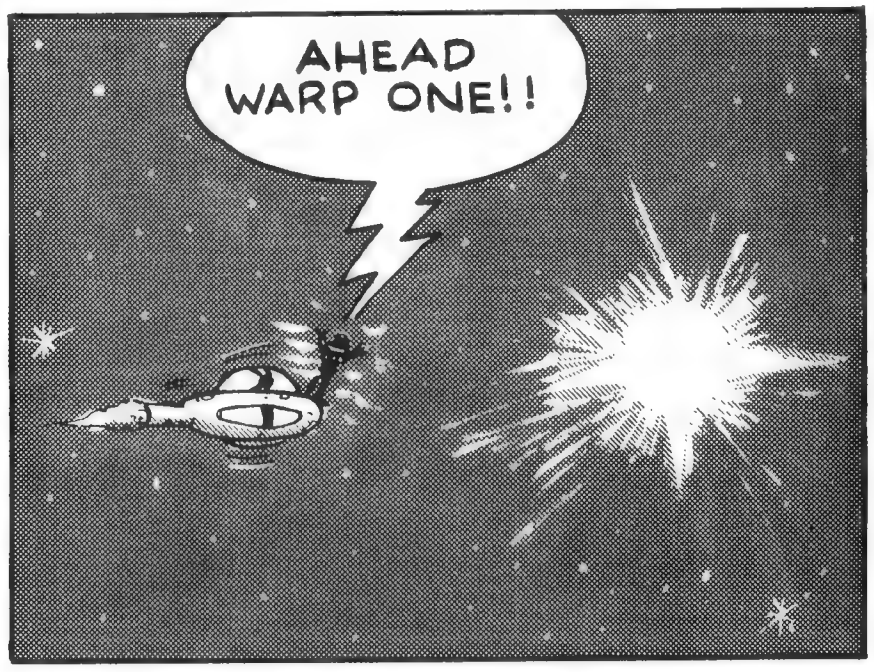
THEY ALL WENT HOME AND LEFT ME. *ARRGH!*— DARN CLOTHES! I'M SUFFERING FROM STATIC KLINGON!

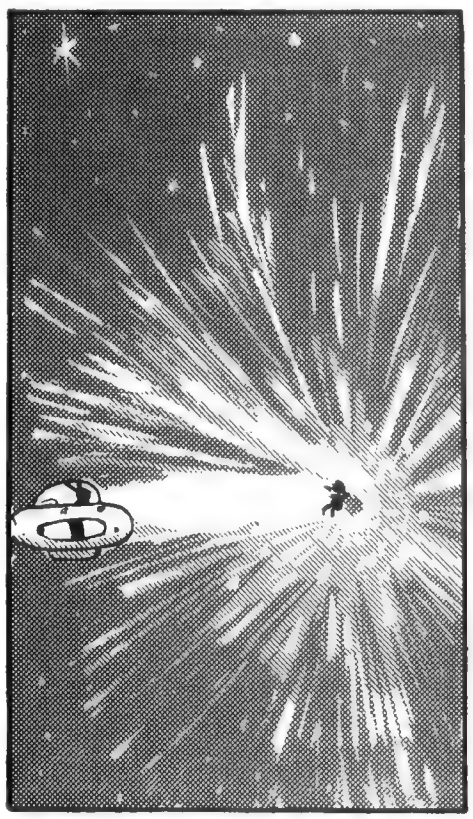
BUT I STILL WANT TO SEEK OUT NEW ADVENTURES, NEW LIFE! BUT, OF COURSE, I HAVE NO SHIP!

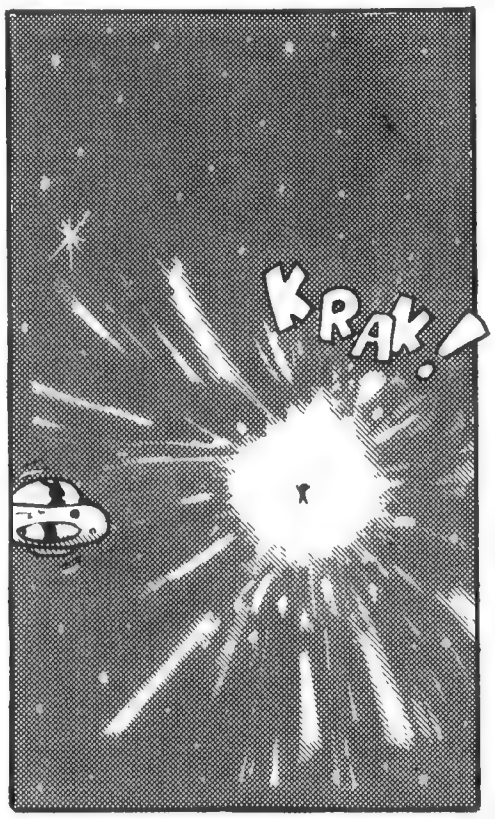

WELL, THERE HAVE BEEN NEW ADVANCEMENTS! WARP DRIVE BELTS FOR INSTANCE!
YOU MEAN I CAN DO IT MYSELF?!

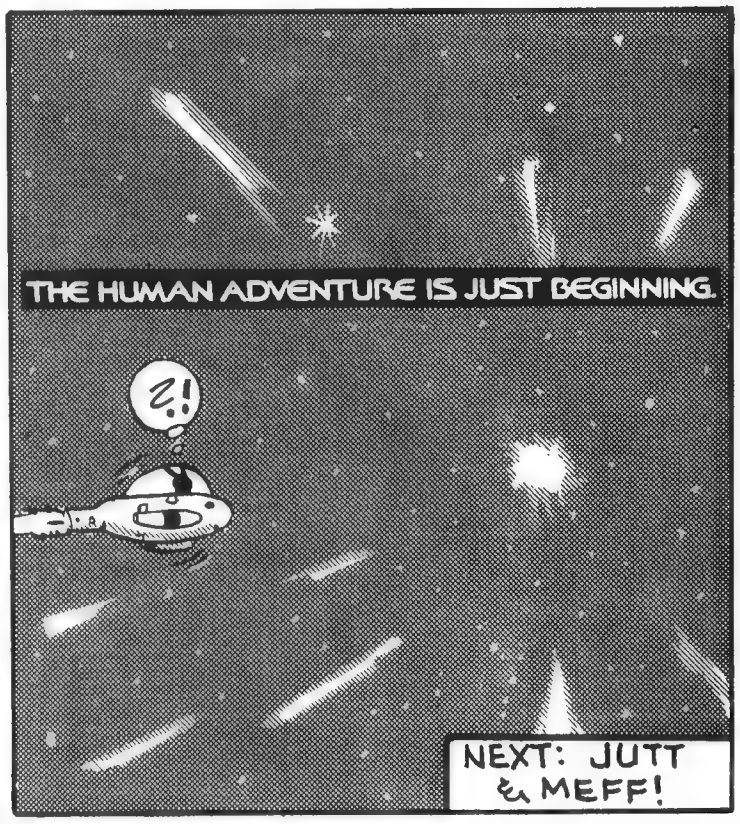

YEP, A FORCE FIELD WILL PROTECT YOU. WE CAN LAUNCH YOU FROM SPACE


SOON...
WE'RE READY, ADMIRAL, AT YOUR DISCRETION!
AT LAST! AT LAST!


AHEAD WARP ONE!!




KRAK!


THE HUMAN ADVENTURE IS JUST BEGINNING.
?!
NEXT: JUTT & MEFF!

HI, I'M PORTIA PRINZ OF THE GLAMAZONS--AND BEFORE I STARTED MY NEWEST ADVENTURE, "GLAMAZON'S BURDEN", I READ ALL OF THE BOOKS IN THIS BOOKCASE!
HAVE YOU? NO? WELL, DON'T BOTHER--READ PORTIA PRINZ INSTEAD. NOT ONLY WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM MY APPLIED RESEARCH--
--BUT I'M A KIERKEGARDIAN LEAP MORE GORGEOUS THAN DAG HAMMARSKÖLD.
--OR SOCRATES--
--GEORGE ELIOT etc.
SHE'S AT IT AGAIN!
PLATO
CAMUS
Turgenev
CHEKOV
SOCRATES
RAND
Austen
Hardy
KIRBY
DICKENS
MOLIERE

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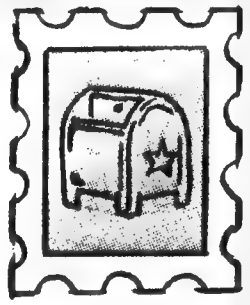
With a new introduction by Richard and Wendy Pini.

Murray Ward is a library assistant at the University of Manitoba, and a graduate of same, with a B.A. in English and Film.



Four-Color Words: PACIFISM IN COMICS

by Murray Ward

Ask any fan, any professional writer, artist, or editor in comics why a super-hero can't be a pacifist, and you'll get the same answer: The two terms are in direct contradiction.

Super-heroes, they will tell you, or indeed any comic book characters, are creatures of **action**; thus, they cannot be passive by nature.

This only goes to show that being a fan, or comics writer, artist, or editor, does not necessarily require a basic knowledge of English spelling. For those among you who don't immediately grasp the distinction, then: Pacifist is spelled P-A-C-I-F-I-S-T, from the Latin **"pax"** or **"Pacem,"** meaning "peace"; while the word my comic-connected brethren are thinking of is Passivist, spelled P-A-S-S-I-V-I-S-T, from passive, meaning to remain unmoving, inactive, at rest. The two **can** at times be the same, in a given context or situation, but are certainly not always so. Yet, it seems, to those of the four-color world, the two terms are always synonymous.

My own main disagreement with this point of view has to do with the fact that, as we older fans are constantly being reminded, comics [like Trix cereal] are for kids. Like the Saturday morning cartoon shows, whose sponsors have carried their censorship priorities to somewhat ridiculous extremes in recent years, admittedly, comic books should, beyond their main purpose as entertainment, try to teach and reinforce positive life values among their own young readers. From my own experience, I can certainly cite enough instances of the characters I grew up with in the '50s and '60s upholding law and order, justice, fair play, and [in some of the better Stan Lee, John Broome, Mort Weisinger, and Gardner Fox stories] a belief in some beneficient order greater than themselves, which made their travails against the "bad guys" worthwhile and noble, be it God, "the Force," or a simple but sacred personal code of ethics. A lot of comics creators seemed to me to have tossed this view of comics out the window during the '70s and '80s, coupled with a relaxation of Comics Code standards to allow for the "classic" [whatever that means] use of vampire, werewolves, and other monsters [presumably ranging from mindless killers like Atlas' Brute to walking-arsenal vigilantes like Marvel's Punisher]. Not only weren't comic book worlds a fun place for me to visit anymore, what with favorite characters standing a 50/50 chance of getting themselves killed or maimed in a given issue [the main hallmark of security from such themes being the byline of a trusted writer, and even **then**...], but the heroes, by and large, weren't people I'd want my kids to know, let alone grow up to emulate.

Fortunately, a lot of the titles which adhered to this strange definition of comics entertainment did not survive for very long and are no longer with us today. As long as one eschews the mystery, war, and certain western comics, one can be reasonably [though not 100%] certain that one will see heroes who act nobly and villains who get their just desserts, as in days of yore. But still, even in my own childhood, relatively free of heroes who swore [Nick Fury said "Cripes!" in a 1967 **"Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D."** story by Steranko and I nearly fell out of my chair; it was the strongest expletive I'd ever seen in a comic], drank [I'm still wondering how the same writer can provide us with Tony Stark's harrowing battle against alcoholism in **IRON MAN** and simultaneously depict The Beast and Wonder Man happily getting plastered in **AVENGERS**], smoked [Ben Grimm's and Nick Fury's stogies were the exception, not the rule, in the 1960s, and certainly nobody, even in a fanzine, would claim one of their heroes took dope—Steve Englehart, are you listening?], or otherwise engaged in activities unsuitable for children, it always bothered me that these were, at their best, characters with

whom I could escape into fantasy, but not characters whose actions I could hold up as examples of sterling behavior to my possible future progeny. Why? Because, for all their Sunday school polemic, when it came to the final crunch, a super-hero's solution to a problem was a fist in the face.

Kids buy comics for action, so super-heroes cannot be pacifists. It says so right here. Why didn't I believe it?

For one thing, no matter what manner of hellery [acceptable hellery at the time] they might have gotten into back in the Golden Age, with the world at war, no holds barred, and no Code, I knew the super-heroes were at heart a peace-loving lot. Yet they were hardly passive; one cannot don a colorful caped costume and roam the streets in search of crimes to prevent and be anything but a full-time activist, not to mention something of an altruist. No matter that many of their very creators could not perceive the distinction, the heroes were activist pacifists, to a degree. Superman had his code against killing; Batman never carried a gun; Spider-Man's main weapon [his webbing] bound his foes, but did not harm them; The Flash seldom actually struck an opponent, being content to merely bowl him over with the cyclonic wind of his super-speed passing; Green Lantern, at least in his early days, struck, non-violently, from a distance with his power beam; such deadly-looking weapons as Thor's hammer, Iron Man's repulsors, Hawkman's mace, and Captain America's shield never hit home on a human antagonist; Daredevil's billy club saw less violent usage than that of an English bobby; both Hawkeye and Green Arrow used their archery skills in a non-lethal manner; and both supergroups to which Superman belonged, man and boy, The Justice League and The Legion of Super-Heroes, adopted his aforementioned code.

Of course, to go along with the non-violent heroes [as Stan Lee so eloquently put it, his characters used "action, not violence"], the Silver Age had its non-violent villains. For years the crime of murder was one that could not be laid at the door of DC's most famous villain, Lex Luthor; the Joker, when he did resort to killing [and he never did during my childhood, only before and after it] was said to be a psychopath, and certainly not to be admired or imitated; none of the Flash or Spidey foes ever did anything more sinister than rob a bank; villains in **FANTASTIC FOUR, AVENGERS, JLA**, or **GREEN LANTERN** might have designs to take over the world, or even the universe, but always in an unbloody manner. If a villain **did** actually kill someone, outside of an origin story of a super-hero, where such action provided its own punishment in the creation of the avenging crusader himself, he was hunted down mercilessly and summarily delivered to justice amid the swearing of mighty oaths of vengeance by the hero.

The super-heroes, then, were pacifists to an extent, if unavowedly, even unthinkably, so. Had they been passive characters, that is, sit-safely-by-the-fire types unwilling to lend a hand to those in need lest they themselves get hurt, they would never have become super-heroes in the first place, and certainly no one would ever have done a comic book about them. Spider-Man, for example, quickly learned the folly of passivism in his origin story: out for himself alone, he has ever since regretted that his deliberate inaction caused the death of his beloved Uncle Ben. The difference, therefore, between your ordinary real-world pacifist, and your comic-book super-hero pacifist, is the oft-repeated moral of Spidey's origin: "With great power comes great responsibility." If you find yourself gifted with a power ring, or super-speed, or the proportionate strength of a spider, or powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, or even if you've acquired your skills the hard way, Batman-like, through a lifetime of training, you are obligated by your very possession of such "powers" to use them to help those less fortunate. This is what Ma and Pa Kent spent a couple of decades drilling into their foster son, Clark; this is what Reed Richards proposed to his cohorts as The Fantastic Four first joined hands at the site of their crashed rocketship.

A potentially lethal weapon used in a non-lethal manner: Hawkeye aims not to kill or to injure, but only to stop the criminals. A number of other Marvel characters, including Iron Man, Captain America, and Spider-Man, also used their tools to defeat criminals without injury.

Still, when one says the forbidden word "pacifist," one's listeners invariably think of one whose credo involves a total abstinence from the use of violence, and surely no super-hero could qualify for that tag. There have been dozens of costumed heroes, cited above, who used violence as a last resort against extraordinary threats to life, limb, and national [even terrestial] security. There have also been, both in the 1940s and in more recent years, those "heroes"

for whom violence was a first response, and a way of life; their code was the Biblical "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth." But what about the other direction? Have there ever been any heroes opposed to the use of violence in any form, any total pacifists?

The idea, to give comics their due, has been attempted a few times. The Silver Surfer is perhaps the most famous example. My own problems with comprehending the Surfer have to do with his behind-the-scenes origins. When he first appeared in the pages of **FANTASTIC FOUR**, he seemed to know nauught of the sanctity of life and was willing to aid his master, Galactus, in wiping out humanity, until instructed by the gentle Alicia Masters. By the time he was awarded his own comic, however, he had undergone a total renaissance of character, and become the comics' closest equivalent of Jesus Christ. Unless your first meeting with The Silver Surfer was in #1 of his own series, it is hard to reconcile the being who once mistakenly tried to unite humanity against a common foe [**FF #72**], using the tactics of violence itself [which never ever works, by the way—ask any pacifist], with the Norrin Radd whose later [and —be it noted—less powerful] incarnation came on like a cosmic-powered Pollyanna. The Surfer series said many good and worthy things about the use and non-use of violence, statements made more powerful by their being uttered by a character with world-shattering potential which he disdained to use. One could only wish that Lee and Kirby [and Buscema?] had conceived the character as a pacifist spokesman from his initial appearance. Given that converts are always very zealous in their new-found beliefs, I can see the Surfer as a profound believer after his indoctrination in the Galactus Trilogy, but his own series never speaks of this, assuming instead that he had always held these beliefs and just conveniently "forgot" them for a moment in that first story.

Thor: Violence breeds violence. His hammer is used primarily for non-violent purposes, such as changing identities or flying.

The most outright pacifist super-hero was a somewhat lesser-known character appropriately called The Dove, of **"The Hawk and the Dove."** Rather than being an alien who preached peace to the earthly masses like The Surfer, The Dove and his more aggressive counterpart were high school student brothers gifted with costumed identities to fight crime. Neither was old enough or mature enough to have come to terms with all the ramifications of their chosen philosophies, so the punch-'em-out-first-and-ask questions-later Hawk had trouble dealing with the fact that his transformation into a super-character didn't automatically make him a John Wayne-like hero [for example, he had a lot of trouble with his fear of heights, as I recall], while The Dove often berated himself as a coward for not leaping into action to get his more reckless sibling out of a tight spot. The series sadly did not last long enough for the protagonists to come to any major conclusions about their beliefs, and perhaps they never would have, since their conflicting ideologies were after all the basis of the strip. Even so, the comic posed some new questions. For one thing, it brought to light, however briefly, the view that to be a pacifist is not always to be passive, and that to forego violence is not always to be a coward. [It is possible, of course, to be both a pacifist and a coward, but the one does not follow from the other.]

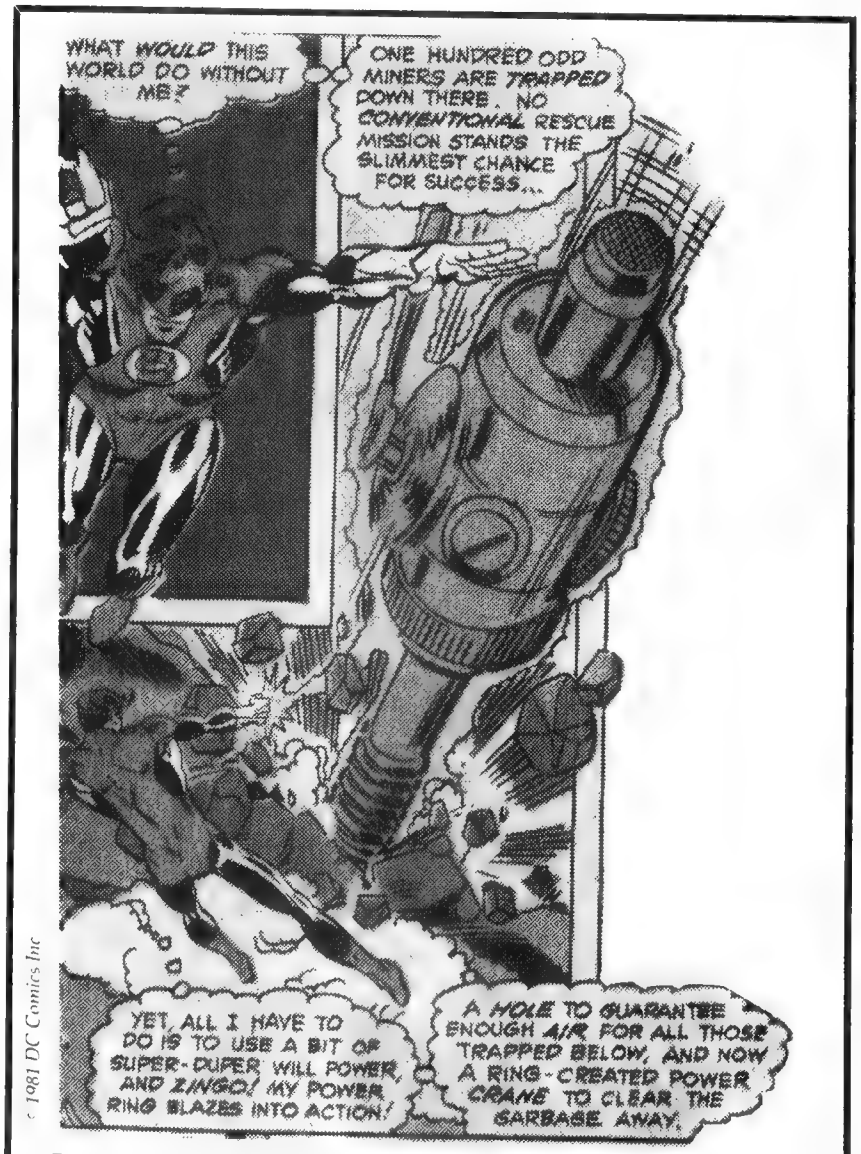
The inspiration for a more recent pacifist in comics comes from the unlikely spawning ground of television, as TV's only-ever avowedly-pacifist series hero, Kwai-Chang Caine, portrayed by David Carradine on **KUNG-FU**, was the surprising model for the Steve Englehart/Jim Starlin/Al Milgrom-created martial arts hero, Shang-Chi, in **MASTER OF KUNG FU**. Caine had viewers in both camps, of course. Based on a variation of the TV formula popularized by **THE FUGITIVE** and emulated by series up to and including **THE INCREDIBLE HULK** today, **KUNG FU** chronicled the adventures of a wanderer, a hero whose supporting characters varied from episode to episode, linked together by the common element of his continuing quest. Kwai-Chang, for those who missed the series or don't remember it well, was the half-breed child of American and Chinese parents who, upon their death, was raised in a Shaolin monastery of the 19th century. Here he learned the doctrine of the Tao [pronounced Dow], or "The Way," which included a code of ultra-pacifism and training in the martial arts, the latter to be used as sparingly as possible for the purposes of self-defense only. Ironically, it was an act against the tenets of his philosophy which led to the adult Caine's odyssey: witnessing the murder of his beloved friend and mentor, the blind Master Po, he in turn killed the perpetrator, a member of the Chinese royal family. Thus, sought by the authorities, he was forced to flee to his father's homeland of America, where every episode he en-

countered different crises in a traditional TV version of the Old West, while at the same time seeking his long-lost brother, Daniel. Some viewers watched with fascination as Caine quietly and self-effacingly turned the other cheek in situations where your average "jock" TV hero would've put his tormentors' lights out permanently; others sat patiently through each hour waiting for the brief moment when Kwai-Chang would let loose with his amazing fighting skills and quite satisfyingly give the astonished villains their comeuppance.

Like The Surfer, Caine possessed a "super-power" which he tried not to use, unless forced to by circumstances beyond his control. Since the martial arts were almost totally unknown in the American West of a hundred years ago, even the warning on a wanted poster circulated by the Chinese government that "his hands and feet are deadly weapons" failed to impress most of those who foolishly tangled with the ex-Shaolin monk. And since, in their experience, a man who knew he could beat up any antagonist would come on strong and spoiling for a fight, they were even less inclined to suspect the gentle and unassuming Caine of any fighting ability whatsoever.

The show gave me one of my favorite definitions of pacifist philosophy: In one episode, **"The Hoots,"** a Hutterite leader, considered by himself and his followers a true pacifist, explains his beliefs to Caine. "If a man strikes me with a stick," said he, "I have three choices. I can stand and allow him to strike me; I can strike back against him; or I can walk away." "There is a fourth choice," amended Caine. "You can take the stick away from him." The Hutterite man was the passivist so many people mistake all pacifists for; Caine's more pragmatic pacifism allowed for the use, not of violence as a counter to violence, but of a non-aggressive counter-measure to prevent further violence. Naturally, not all pacifists are secretly masters of kung fu, either in comics, on TV, or in real life. But the idea behind Caine's words is still an admirable one, and is part and parcel of the same idea put forth in the Spider-Man origin.

In his first few episodes, Shang-Chi of the comics followed the example of Kwai-Chang of the TV screen, as depicted by his creators. The series, perhaps stunningly to those brought up on the traditional super-hero, was an overnight hit, spawning a giant-sized quarterly, a black-and-white magazine, and promoting the initial four-color book to monthly status. Sadly, its very succes proved its undoing, as the original creators of the character were unable to remain with the series and give it the time and thought it required [writing a pacifist comic book is harder than it looks, and it doesn't even **look** easy], and so departed, leaving poor Shang-Chi to wallow in a quagmire of senseless violence for a time. Eventually, a new direction was established for the book, which enabled it to continue in a secret-agent motif while remaining at least flavored with the Caine-like ideologies of the original Shang-Chi. Perhaps the series could never have continued indefinitely as it was first created; certainly it would have become a bit hard to swallow that unprovoked violence would follow Shang-Chi wherever he went, unless every single episode was somehow to involve the series' continuing villain, Fu Manchu. Still, it would have been nice to see the attempt made.


WHAT WOULD THIS WORLD DO WITHOUT ME?
ONE HUNDRED ODD MINERS ARE TRAPPED DOWN THERE. NO CONVENTIONAL RESCUE MISSION STANDS THE SLIMMEST CHANCE FOR SUCCESS...
YET, ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TO USE A BIT OF SUPER-DUPER WILL POWER, AND ZINGO! MY POWER RING BLAZES INTO ACTION!
A HOLE TO GUARANTEE ENOUGH AIR FOR ALL THOSE TRAPPED BELOW, AND NOW A RING-CREATED POWER CRANE TO CLEAR THE GARBAGE AWAY!
© 1981 DC Comics Inc

Green Lantern: Given a weapon with potential limited only by the user, he turned it into a valuable tool as well. Against criminals, he frequently used it indirectly.

Comics, then, have tried only fleetingly to deal with a pacifist as protagonist, for the main reason, seemingly, that such a hero is very difficult to portray properly. Nevertheless, professed pacifists do show up in comics from time to time, and, as on television outside of the **KUNG FU** series, they are usually characterized incorrectly. For some reason, they always live in exclusive colonies or cults, cut off from the outside world, as if that were the only possible way to practice pacifism and survive. [Maybe this idea grew out of the Shaolin monastery locale for **KUNG FU**'s frequent flashback sequences; if so, it should be pointed out that the monastery was a mere training ground for Caine and his order—once accepted into full priesthood, they were expected to go out into the outside world and actively perform good works.] Al-

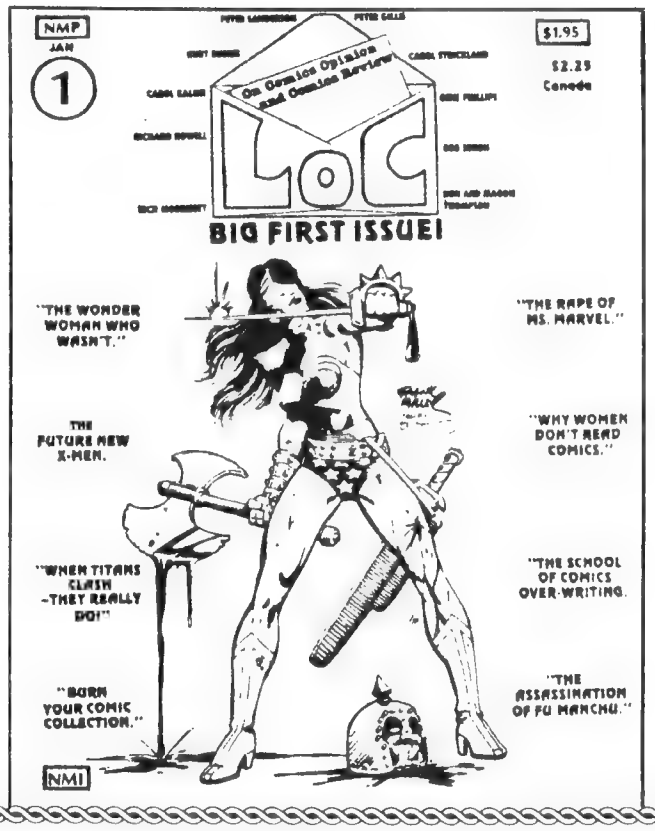
so, the comic-book pacifists are almost invariably passive characters, refusing to struggle, even non-violently, against an aggressor. A recent example of this that comes easily to mind is the Marv Wolfman/ George Perez depiction of Raven's homeworld in **THE NEW TEEN TITANS.** Raven's mother and her people are denounced loudly by The Titans for their inaction, and rightly so, although the Titans' way is no more admirable. The conflict against Trigon, Raven's demonic father, is presented in a starkly black-and-white context, as if no third alternative, other than looking the other way or striking back, was possible. As it is, thanks to the practice of passivity in place of pacifism—thanks to "walking away" instead of "taking away the stick"—the situation has been allowed to reach a point at which, perhaps, a pacifist solution is no longer tenable.

Obviously, like the portrayal of the handicapped characters in comics discussed in **LOC #3**, and like the portrayal of heroes who maintain a personal code of honorable behavior without seeming to lack convictions, the depiction of the pacifist, whether as supporting character or hero, is difficult to do correctly. However, inasmuch as young [and even old] comics readers are consciously and unconsciously having their values shaped and reaffirmed by what they read and see on the four-color page every day, it is almost a holy duty for the creators of comics to depict at least some heroes whose immediate response to violence is not equally brutal counter-violence, but a deep-felt sadness, followed by affirmative non-violent preventive action.

THE NEW TEEN
TITANS
50¢
YOU'RE TOO LATE TO SAVE YOUR PRECIOUS PLANET, TITANS!
NOTHING CAN SURVIVE THE FURY OF TRIGON THE TERRIBLE!

"Comic book pacifists are almost invariably passive characters, refusing to struggle, even non-violently, against an aggressor. A recent example of this... is the Marv Wolfman/ George Perez depiction of Raven's homeworld in *THE NEW TEEN TITANS*... The conflict against Trigon... is presented as if no third alternative, other than looking the other way or striking back, was possible.

LOC BACK ISSUES



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$2.00

They've seen it in Australia...

One child and one adult please...

Box Office

They've seen it in Europe...

Pass the popcorn, Lady D?

ROYAL BOX OFFICE

And now it's here, yes ***here***, in the good ol' USA...

Oh, be still my ***beating*** heart!!

OOOOO

OOOO!!!

It's About Time!

Yes, it's the ***return*** of the ***Man of Sell***—

OK, kids, get in line!

DAILY PLANET

MACY'S

That's right, kids—get in line, because the champion of life, liberty, and theater managers is back to make some...

SUPERBUX TOO

THE CASHFLOW CONTINUES ON AND ON...

written and drawn by T. LINEHAN"

Sorry, folks—my super-hearing tells me Lowest Lane is in trouble ***again!***

CINEMA

1 FINALLY, AT LONG LAST! 2 DOUBLE BILL KRAMER ATTACKS KRAMER ALSO CORNERY PEOPL

Hey, Super-Shlump—get your cape back here! I've been in line for ***18 hours!***

NO FOOLIN' FOLKS

AIR CONDITIONED

Look—up in the sky! It's a ***bird!***

It's a ***plane!***

No, it's—***Superbux!!***

Yeah!

Whoopee!!

Ohh, ***Superbux***, you'd better hurry— there's a ***bomb*** on that elevator!

No foolin', Lowest! If you'd stop pawing me all over, I could ***save*** humanity!

Love, shmove —they're having a ***fight!***

Look, Fred, they're in ***love!***

Gawd, that Lowest is horny! She's the only Earthling I know who eats Vitamin E like dinner mints!

YES, A BOMB!

WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING!

DOWN IN BACK, NED!

WHO ARE YOU CALLING

YOU'RE A NUMBSKULL

DON'T TELL ME HOW TO DRIVE.

8-TRACK OR CASSETTE

I CAN'T LOOK

Earthy Condo

REMEMBER THEM?

Look out!

Hey — you're not supposed to have any dialogue, None!

Yeah, you big— ***EEYAHHH!***

"You big Eeyahhh"?

Zoot, now that we're free from Clypton's Noogie-Noogie Zone, what do we do now, huh, wha' we do now, Zoot, eh, wutzup?

Well, Erpa, my black queen, we are going down to that world and do what we do naturally—we're going to go in there and kill, maim, and destroy. And then—and ***only*** then— will we be ready to take on... The Pepsi Challenge!

Klerk, you may not know it, but you have some endearing qualities!

You make an ***excellent*** straight man!

Like what, Lowest?

"We"?

Bloatis, you blithering ***fool***—first, we're escaping. Then we're killing ***Superbux***. And ***then***—off to Palisades Park!

Gawrsh, Mr. Rex Ruthor—what are we gonna do?

TONIGHT'S FILM SUPER MAN III

That's Right! We're BAD! Uh-huh! That's

761 BOYS

2468

Meanwhile, on a Schlepperton Studios soundstage...

Look — they need ***suits*** to survive in!

blip

They need a good tailor, too...

It's only a paper Moon... Built on Taxfree Studio...

THIS IS YOUR MOON KEEP IT CLEAN!

Blimey—what are ***you*** doing ***here***?

CUT!!!

Can't you aliens stay on your ***own*** set?

heh heh ***Sorry!***

That's the third time ***today!!***

OUTBLAND SOUND DEPT.

THE BIG HOUSE

Mr. Ruthor... Wait, Mr. Ruthor...

Good-bye, suckers!

I don't pay you to ***think*** !!

Rex, I think that's ***terrible!***

Well, Lowest, this is it...

You can put me down now...

I wish Klerk would hurry back with that food...

HALP!

YAY!!

HELP!

Yoo hoo, ***Superbux***... it's ***me***, Lowest! You know, the love of your life!! ***Hey you!!***

CLIK WHIR

Whatta ingrate! You make him an overnight (ahem) sensation—then, ***poof!***—he turns into as big a nerd as Klerk Cant...

Hey...

Oh, Lowest...

Miss Typecaster, we are about to find out ***Superbux'*** life story...

What do you think—you have a monopoly on advice, Kor-Al?

At least *I'm* not telling it to total *strangers*...

Well, he's *my* son, *too*, y'know!

HUBBA-HUBBA

Gee, Lowest, where do you *get* those ideas of yours?

So the way I figure it, Klerk, —***you're Superbux!*** What a scoop, eh, four-eyes?

Oh, let's just say that I have my sources!

LOWEST LANE COMICS

SUPER BUX'S GIRL-FRIEND

LOWEST LANE... BARTENDER

99¢

ON SALE!

NEW ISSUE

We interrupt ***THE BULLWINKLE SHOW*** to bring you this news flash! Three aliens have conquered the small town of Totaled, Texas!

Now, as we watch live, the battle rages on...

And ***I*** say the fight in the Roller Derby stays in, you Limey!

You provincial putz, have you no artistic ***feel***? You know it will clash with the Mud-Wrestling scene in the Houston Astrodome!

HALP!

ARGGH!

To Tooled TEXAS

Gee, Lowest, I'm sorry your plan didn't work!

Shut up, you =9#§★= wimp, and get me my comb!

THE OZZIE NELSON LOOK

HOOPS

Look—up in the air! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's...

Superbux!! Klerk Cant is ***Superbux!!*** I was ***right!!***

Lucky for her she's not Rex Ruthor... or ***POW!*** Right to the moon!

While at the nation's capital—

All right, which one of you is gonna kneel down before me, Zoot?

Now, come ***on!*** I ***haven't*** got all ***day***. ***Which*** of you is the ***President***?

I am!

You answered too soon, so you can't be!

But I am, ain't I, fellers? I'm the guy with the bombs...

It's okay, Alex. You tried. We should have known not to try to fool the Moral Majority!

But I ***am*** the President! This is an ***emergency! I have*** the ***bombs***...

This is worse than even ***I*** had figured it would!

Let me just heat that up for you, Lowest!

Something tells me you don't do much entertaining...

OUT TO LUNCH

Aw, gee, Ma, she's a ***swell*** girl! Her teeth are straight and...

LYPTON COLD SHOWER

I ***don't care***. No son of ***mine*** is going to shack up with some cheap floozy from a weird dimension...

Gosh, Lowest, do you realize fans've been waiting ***years*** for this?

They're gonna have to keep waiting! This is as much as they get!

DO NOT DISTURB!

And, in return for helping to ensure ***Superbux'*** defeat, I ask only ***one small favor...***

How small?

The video-cassette rights to the movie!

OK!

You're ***mad!***

Hey, you okay, Mister?

Come on. Just let me at him! Lemme at him!

Klerk! Are you all ***right?***

That's ***it***! I'm going back to the Attic of I-Want-to-Be-Alone-Ness! If I can get trashed by a wimp in Nome, Alaska, I'll last ten minutes at the ***DAILY PEANUT!***

Speaking of which...

Where's ***Superbux?***

Where's Kor-Al's son, huh?

DAIRY PEANUT

Just where *is* this "Great American Hero"?

Hey, get outa here or I'll sic my lawyers on you!

You called?

CALL SOLor SOLO

Well, it's about *time* you got here!

It's *my* movie, Zoot! I'll do as I please!

Zoot, why are we fighting? What did my father *do*? Tell me, Zoot!

Well, for *starters*, he was *terrible* in *POPPYLIPS NOW*!

ZAP!

COLA-COLA INC

BUY

Hey, mister, clear out!

Yeah, you'll be killed!

$Free plugs! I *love* 'em!$

Take *that*, Zoot!

That *does* it, *Superbux*! You've left me no alternative but to use *forced busing*!

EEYARGHHH! What a bad pun!

Oh, *no!*

METROPOLIS

Superbux—a pantywaist!

CIGAR

It's *terrible!*

Exit, stage *right!*

BELS

GIMB

Come back, you Clypton Klutz!!

BOO!

HISS!

PEREZ ST

Why couldn't I fall in love with someone normal—like Chuck Barris?

Ruthor, are we there yet?

I'm *not* your "Dearie," Earthling...

Just take a left at that popsicle over there, Dearie...

SUPERBUX'S ATTIC OF TWAN TIQUE MOVIEMERS

Boy, ***Superbux***, you sure know how to make your guests feel at home...

My synthetic ***Superbux*** have even fooled Lowest!

Say, stud—come here often?

DA REEL DING

100% Polyester

Hey, ***Superbux***, help me make a good impression on my clients?

Hey, come on, guys, get serious!

These three maniacs are your ***clients***?

"Maniacs"? Is that any way to talk about folks from your home town?

So, ***Superbux*** agrees to another Clypton Cold Shower...

There's ***got*** to be an easier way to impress a girl..

Hey, ***Superbux*** isn't the ***only*** super-hero who can stand up to ice, you know!

POW

IT'S CAPT. ANACONDA!

I've got to get into this satire ***somehow***...

You've got to ***trust*** me, Lowest!

I'm ***warning*** you, Klerk —don't come ***near*** me! I know what's gonna happen—you'll kiss me, then ***blotto!***

Making Sense of Senseless Murder. Editorial

Just ***trust*** me...

MMMMMM

Oh, yes I did... on...

Hey—I remember you're Superbux!! You didn't use the mind-erase gag!!

...the audience!

They're happy as clams!

Yes, for about two or three years!

COMING SOON

SUPERBUX 3

SUPERBUX III

SUPERBUX III

SUPERBUX III

SUPERBUX III

SUPERBUX III

What say we take care of that loser in the diner?

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would a serious scholar attempt to prevent his study of the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES from being "mere opinion?"

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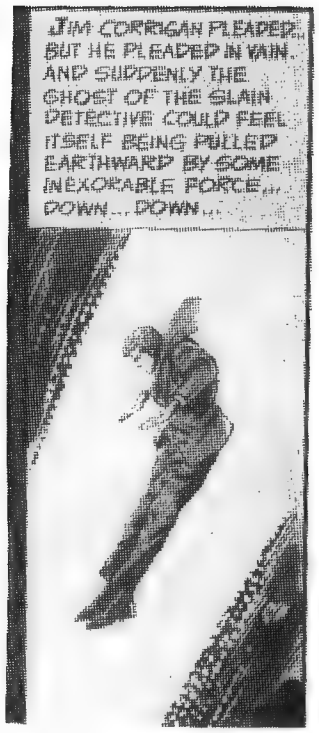
JIM CORRIGAN PLEADED, BUT HE PLEADED IN VAIN. AND SUDDENLY THE GHOST OF THE SLAIN DETECTIVE COULD FEEL ITSELF BEING PULLED EARTHWARD BY SOME INEXORABLE FORCE... DOWN... DOWN...

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Paul Balzé is a 1981 graduate of Andover High School in Maryland. He has collected comics seriously for seven years now, and prefers DCs and the Batman in particular.

ALL FLESH IS GLASS

by Paul Balze

Unlike Fred Hembeck and probably many other fans, I didn't discover "serious" comics (isn't that a contradiction?) until about the time when a lot of kids start to give them up. Though I had picked up a comic or two (about seven between 1969 and 1973, actually) in the past, my real comics-buying years began in early 1974, when I was just past ten. Because of exposure to cartoons and that 1966-68 TV series (which I stopped watching about 1976, when I finally realized what hopeless crap it was), The Batman was my favorite. The series I caught most frequently that year were **BATMAN** and **THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD**. However, I also ran across another series which had a strange appeal to my 10½-year-old mind: **ADVENTURE COMICS** starring "The Spectre"!!

Now, The Batman was fine, but I was really grabbed by The Spectre! The first issue I got was **ADVENTURE #435, "The Man Who Stalked The Spectre,"** by Mike Fleisher with "script continuity" by Russell Carley and art by Jim Aparo. This, incidentally, is the issue with the now-infamous "buzzsaw" sequence, of which we'll see more later. But first, a brief history of The Spectre.

The Spectre appeared on the scene in **MORE FUN COMICS #52**, February, 1940. Although The Spectre appeared in costume on the cover of **MFC #52**, he didn't actually don it until the end of #53. Those two issues told the origin of our Ghostly Guardian, as he came to be called. Written by Superman creator Jerry Siegel and drawn by Bernard Baily, that first story opened peacefully enough...

Jim Corrigan, "hard-boiled detective," is clowning around with his roommate on the night his engagement to debutante Clarice Winston is to be announced. Roomie Wayne Grant's first line is like something out of a satire: "Love finds Jim Corrigan! Why a beautiful and wealthy young socialite like Clarice Winston should want to marry a lug like you is beyond me!" As Corrigan playfully ducks Wayne's head in the sink, the landlady comes in to tell Jim that one of his stoolies is there. The stoolie (one Louie Snipe, a truly brilliant name) tells Jim that the Westmore Warehouse will be robbed that night.

Now, does Jim call the cops? Does he go to Clarice's party?

Hell, no! He grabs a cab, goes to the warehouse and trashes the crooks all by himself—unarmed, yet!

Meanwhile, Clarice is wondering what's keeping Jim. She calls Wayne, who refers her to headquarters, who refers her to Lakeside Hospital. Clarice is obviously the worrying type: she greets her fiance with "If I wasn't a lady, I'd be inclined to knock your ears off!" Jim & Clarice leave the hospital in Clarice's car, unaware they are being followed by "Gat" Benson (another great name), boss of the dudes Corrigan nabbed. After a brief argument and a tender love scene in the front seat, Benson and his men force Clarice & Jim into another car and take them to a warehouse on the waterfront. Benson's men proceed to knock Jim senseless and waste no time in sealing him in a barrel of cement, which they then heave into the river.

Jim finds himself floating... somewhere. He spots a "patch of light" ahead. He heads towards it at "infinite speed," then slows and stops, suspended before it. "Only one thing can explain this experience," Jim thinks. "**—I—I'm dead!**"

Bright fella, that Corrigan. It's easy to see how he

made detective.

"But for some reason I'm not passing through the gates of eternity—Why?"

Well, it should be obvious, Jim! You're not **going THERE!**

At this point, a disembodied voice [shown in jagged pink-edged balloons] explains to Corrigan that "your mission on Earth is unfinished... you shall remain earthbound battling crime on your world with supernatural powers, until all vestiges of it are gone!!"

Of course! Sure, wipe out all evil in the world! Hey, why not? Just whisk down there, wipe out all evil in the world, and be in heaven by breakfast time! Jim's not too thrilled, though. He protests that he wants eternal rest, but to no avail. He rockets through—ah—whatever, and finds himself on the river bottom. He doesn't drown, though. Strolling along the riverbed, Jim comes across a barrel with a hand sticking out of it.

"I must be looking at my **own body**!"

Oh, really? Remember, this was 1940. If movies of that time are to be believed, this kind of—ah—elimination—happened with some frequency. It coulda been some **other** fool's body! Anyway, Jim whisks up to the surface and floats around a while. Then he hears Clarice scream and rushes to her rescue! Continued next month!

Jim remains in the process of passing through the wall of Benson's hideout until the beginning of **MORE FUN #53**, which finds Clarice about to be killed by Benson's men. She conveniently faints, giving Jim the next five pages to do his stuff. And do it he does! Jim stares one thug to death [that's "stares" with a "t"], turns another to a skeleton, and creates three duplicates of Benson which then beat Benson senseless. Clarice, meanwhile, has been struck with a stray bullet. When Jim finishes with the thugs, he touches Clarice's wound, which instantly heals. Then he brings two of the men back to life [they're vegetables now, but they're alive] and calls the cops. He later breaks up with Clarice, moves into an apartment of his own, and adopts his Spectre identity... and so ends the origin.

The Spectre was later given one of those jackass sidekicks everybody had in the forties—a guy named Percival Popp, the Super Cop—and made his last appearance in **MORE FUN #101** in 1945.

In the 1960s, The Spectre was one of the many Golden Age heroes to be revived. He appeared in **SHOWCASE #60, 61** & **64** and ten issues of his own book from 1967 to 1969. He also appeared in several Justice League-Justice Society team-ups until **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #83** [September 1970], in which he was "killed" saving Earths One & Two.

Then, in 1973, DC began publishing the reprint

One of the many gruesome deaths the Spectre meted out to terrorists, murderers, and the other evil-doers he met in his ten-issue run in *ADVENTURE COMICS* in the early 1970s.

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book **SECRET ORIGINS**. The demand for the Spectre's origin was so great that they devoted all of **SO #5** [Nov.-Dec. 1973] to reprinting the origin just described [incidentally, that's where **I** got it]. Then the decision was made to place The Spectre in the lead spot in **ADVENTURE COMICS**, which was then [as now] a book in search of a lasting format. Since Supergirl's departure with **#**424 [October 1972], **ADVENTURE** had featured Captain Fear in **#**425, The Vigilante and the Adventurers' club in **#**426 & 427, and The Black Orchid in **#**428-430. The readership seemed decidedly underwhelmed, despite artwork by Alex Toth, Alex Nino and Gil Kane in **ADVENTURE #425** alone.

"The Wrath of... The Spectre" led off **ADVENTURE #431** [Jan.-Feb., 1974]. Written by Mike Fleisher and drawn by Jim Aparo, **"Wrath"** set the tone for the series: the criminals were cold, calculating and bloodthirsty. In this issue, a gang armed with machine guns and fire-grenades rob an armored truck and kill all four guards, who had surrendered anyway. Then, when the police arrive and wound one of the crooks, his pals kill him so he can't talk. Jim Corrigan tracks down the gang members and disposes of them thusly as The Spectre:

He terrifies one into driving over a cliff. The car explodes and the thug burns to death.

He melts one into a puddle of wax—while the melting crook is still conscious.

He appears before the gang leader—and only him—on a plane. The Spectre douses the plane's lights. When the lights come back on, the ringleader has been skeletonized and his pitiful remains are seated in the aisle of the plane.

The story ends with Corrigan's boss ordering him to catch the gang...

ADVENTURE #432 featured **"The Anguish of**

The Spectre." In this one, a gang of three people murder a millionaire so that his partner can take over their business. Corrigan becomes romantically involved with the millionaire's daughter, Gwen Sterling, later, but the conspirators all pay...

Partner Maxwell Flood, panicked by the Spectre's appearance in the guise of his murdered partner, runs to one of the killers. He is strangled by his former employee.

Then, Flood's killer gets himself chopped off at the waist by a pair of barber's shears The Spectre has enlarged and animated.

Then, **that** guy's twin brother, who was also in on the Sterling murder, gets turned into sand and collapses into a neat pile in the street.

Finally, the third killer, a fashion model, is aged decades in seconds and drops dead of old age in the middle of a fashion show.

All these people meet their ends while fully conscious and in horrible agony.

"The Swami and The Spectre" [#433] concerns a swami-type who runs a neat little con game: he has a following of society matrons from whom he solicits donations, ostensibly to continue his "great spiritual work." Oddly enough, no one seems to wonder how he came to afford the palatial estate from which he works. When one woman's husband won't give her any more money for her to give Swami Seelal, he puts on a big show of how worried he is: "I shall **implore** the spirits to overlook his narrow-minded skepticism!" When his troupe of suckers leaves, Seelal tells his pug-ugly assistant, Smiley, that "a bit of righteous anger from the astral realm would be most appropriate at this time!"

The "righteous anger" takes the form of a multi-ton dump truck which literally mashes the woman's husband into the dirt. Jim Corrigan is called in to investigate the "accident" and decides to pay a little visit to Seelal, since the widow mentions him and fiercely defends him when Corrigan mentions that Seelal has a long record. Corrigan confronts Seelal with his suspicions and leaves. Then Gwen Sterling [remember her?] enters the picture. She's all upset because she's getting involved with a man who is, after all, dead! Seelal promptly sets up a giant scam to free Jim from the spirit world. This involves Jim meeting Gwen & Seelal at a cemetery. As Jim arrives at the cemetery, Smiley the ape-man throws a hand grenade at Jim's car. Needless to say, this plays Hell with the resale value of Jim's car. The Spectre wafts from the burning wreckage just in time to save Gwen from being killed by Smiley. He then buries Smiley alive. Very neat. The next day, The Spectre confronts Swami Seelal in the middle of a "reading." The thing is, only Seelal can see The Spectre. The ladies are, of course, very impressed by Seelal's terrified reactions. They're even more impressed when The Spectre turns the Swami into glass and smashes him on the floor.

Starting to see a pattern forming? Getting a little queasy, maybe? Well, hold on, 'cause the best is yet to come!

"The Nightmare Dummies and The Spectre" [**ADVENTURE #434**] is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. One, some very nice pencils by **"Red Sonja"**-penciller Frank Thorne, inked by Jim Aparo. Two, it depicts what is probably the most vicious retaliation of The Spectre's career. But more on that later.

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The Spectre takes care of a threat on his "life." A mannekin maker has sent an animated duplicate of Jim Corrigan's girl-friend to destroy him.

The story concerns some mannikins made by a certain company, Monarch Mannikins. These mannikins, however, have a rather nasty habit of suddenly coming to life, at which time they proceed to slaughter any and all human beings handy. Once they've killed all immediately available humans, they become inanimate once again.

Jim Corrigan becomes involved after some of the mannikins wipe out a storeful of people. His investigation of the Monarch factory leads him to one Ezekial Borosvitch, who talks of his hand-made mannikins as though they were alive.

Through some circumstances I won't go into here, Gwen Sterling winds up in Borosvitch's workroom...

That night, Jim Corrigan answers his door to what appears to be Gwen. Jim starts talking to her. When at one point he turns his back to her, she pulls a meat cleaver from her purse and tries to split Jim's skull. She succeeds in cracking the wall in front of Jim.

Jim's whole character instantly changes. His expression changes to a scowl. He begins to sound like The Spectre. "That was very **foolish**, my dear!" he hisses. "Very foolish **indeed**! For to arouse the anger of **Jim Corrigan** is to tempt the wrath of...

The Spectre...!"

What happens next is best described by the original caption:

"It is a sight to chill the blood of mortal men, as the meat cleaver comes miraculously to life, whirling through the air with mighty blows, hacking off Gwen's arms, severing her legs from her body, smashing her skull in two..."

Great stuff, huh? Now, keep in mind that Jim **doesn't know for sure** that this **isn't really Gwen.** Nor does he seem to give a damn. He just chops her up without a second thought. Only **after** the pieces hit the floor does he see that it's a dummy. **Now** see why I call this The Spectre at his most vicious?

After a little lingerie and bondage scene with Gwen in ol' Zeke's workroom [where Zeke's been holding her], we get the confrontation. Zeke sics his dummies on The Spectre, who promptly reduces them to warm puddles. He then turns Zeke into a mannikin, which is burned at story's end along with all of Zeke's surviving work. Gwen? The Spectre saved her. Yawn...

ADVENTURE #434 is also noteworthy because it is here that we finally are told that this is the Earth-**One** Spectre, as opposed to the Earth-**Two** Spectre, who was killed in **JLA #83**.

Remember the "buzzsaw" sequence? Be patient, it's comin' right up! **"The Man Who Stalked The Spectre"** [**AC #435**] introduces Earl Crawford of **NEWSBEAT** magazine, who is a persistent rectal pain for the next couple of issues. He's also a Clark Kent-lookalike, but more on that later. This month's worthless vermin are the Grandenetti gang, Jerry, Mitch and The Other One. The Grandenettis, armed with machine guns, rob a jewelry store and coldbloodedly kill everyone in their way. When their getaway car crashes, they split up. One hides in a meat locker. The Spectre finds him there and freezes him in a huge lump of ice.

Earl Crawford, meanwhile, has seen reports of the Spectre's previous activities and thinks that it might be a good story if he could explain these mysterious deaths. So, on the pretense of doing a routine crime story for **NEWSBEAT**, he gets himself fixed up to ride with Jim Corrigan.

As Crawford and Corrigan get into Corrigan's '68 Buick, they get a call: Mitch Grandenetti has barricaded himself in a toy store with four hostages. Corrigan arrives at the scene and quickly goes into action as The Spectre. [Continuity freaks take note: When Jim refers to Crawford as "Clark Kent," a uniformed cop asks, "Gee, are you really **Superman**?" And this is **supposed** to be on Earth-One!] After luring Grandenetti away from the hostages, The Spectre enlarges a lead figure of a battle-ax-wielding Viking to life-size and animates it. The Viking then splits Grandenetti's skill with the ax, after which The Spectre turns Grandenetti into one of those little lead figures—with the ax still embedded in his skull. Crawford later finds the figure...

That night, Crawford intercepts a tip intended for Jim on where the last Grandenetti is hiding out. Crawford drives out to the hideout [an old sawmill] to warn Grandenetti of his possible doom at the Spectre's hands. See what's coming?

Grandenetti is skeptical, to say the least, and just as Crawford is about to get himself ventilated, The Spectre shows up. He turns Grandenetti into a wooden statue and then [the moment you've been waiting for] puts the statue into the buzzsaw. Grandenetti is cut into a couple of dozen neat slices, like a wooden salami. Whew!

Shades of EC!

ADVENTURE #436's **"The Gasmen and The Spectre"** utilizes that grand old comics-plotting device, the paramilitary terrorist gang. This bunch invades a car show and phosgene-gasses fifty or sixty people. Later, they demand a billion dollars or they'll carry out another "terrorist action" against the city. Jim Corrigan agrees to deliver the ransom. Once he is delivered to the oceanfront "headquarters" of Field Marshal Offal [yet another great name], he wastes no time in disposing of the terrorists.

- He turns one to stone and fuses him to the face of a cliff.
- He impales two with a giant mapmaker's compass.
- When Offal tries to escape by speedboat, The Spectre turns the boat into a giant squid, which proceeds to shove Offal [head-first, I might add] squirming and screaming for his life.

Now, that last scene musta set some stomachs to rumbling. After all, being devoured alive by a 100-foot plus giant squid can't be very pleasant [didn't bother **me**, though! My 11-year-old mind loved it!

A terrorist's boat becomes a giant squid: A scene that "musta set some stomachs to rumbling."

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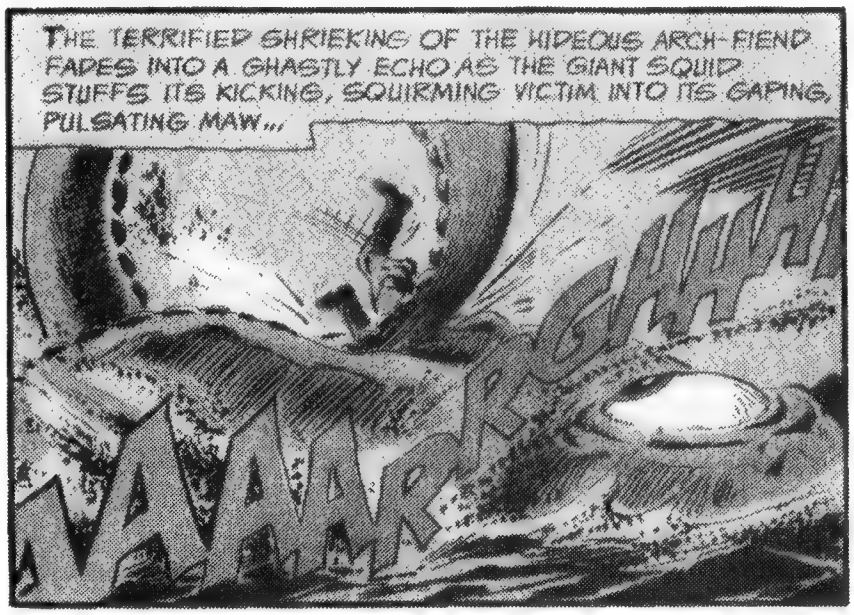
THE TERRIFIED SHRIEKING OF THE HIDEOUS ARCH-FIEND FADES INTO A GHASTLY ECHO AS THE GIANT SQUID STUFFS ITS KICKING, SQUIRMING VICTIM INTO ITS GAPING, PULSATING MAW...
AAAA

This was hot stuff!]. After this, though, things calmed down for a couple of issues.

ADVENTURE #437 featured **"The Human Bombs and The Spectre,"** about a mad scientist-type who has prominent citizens kidnapped, hypnotizes them to do his bidding, and then sends them out to rob places while wearing bombs strapped to their chests. In a curious little scene early in the story, the Doc disposes of his hired thugs [who have just grabbed Gwen Sterling, by the way] by hypnotizing them and forcing them to walk into a tank of barracuda the professor happens to have around. Why, I don't know.

The professor also causes three deaths when his first "human bomb" meets with a little resistance and retaliates by blowing himself up, along with the two guys who tried to stop him. What a mess...

The Spectre eventually catches up with the professor, and hypnotizes him into walking into his own alligator pit. Again, why he has an alligator pit, I don't know.

This issue also marks Ernie Chan's [then Chua] debut as pencil artist of this feature. His style, which made everyone look a bit greasy, combined with the quite-different style of inker Jim Aparo for a rather strange effect. Also, Chan seemed to feel that Jim Corrigan should have a sinister air about him, so Chan gave Jim upswept eyebrows and often put deep shadows around Jim's eyes so that they were sometimes totally obscured. I never much cared for this, though.

Chua's second and last Spectre story was **"The Spectre Haunts the Museum of Death"** in **ADVENTURE #438**. This issue was probably the low point of the series in terms of shock, at least in the manner of the villain's death. This guy was another scientist-type. Specifically, he was a taxidermist. This one also employs thug-assistants. Together, they grab people off the streets and haul them back to the Museum of Natural History, where the professor works. But, after closing, the professor has been stuffing his victims for display in a gruesome set of dioramas in the museum basement. When it comes to disposing of these characters, The Spectre is really rather unimaginative: He pulls the old "stare of death" routine on one of the assistants, then brings a bunch of stuffed gorillas to life so that they can beat the professor and his surviving assistant to death.

Yawn...

ADVENTURE #439-440 had a couple of very ironic titles: **"The Voice That Doomed The Spectre"** [**#439**] and **"The Second Death of The Spectre"** [**#440**]. Ironic because, besides being the only two-parter of the series, these issues contained the last published story of the series... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

At first appearance, **"Voice"** looks like a return of the "old" Spectre of **ADVENTURE #431-436**,

WHY HAVE I BEEN TORN FROM MY GRAVE TO--
...AS... THE SPECTRE--!
NO MAN CAN ESCAPE HIS DESTINY--! AND YOUR DESTINY IS TO REMAIN EARTHBOUND... TO STRIKE AT EVIL WITH THE FEARSOME VENGEANCE OF THE HEREAFTER...
WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT VENGEANCE? IT'S ETERNAL REST I WANT! CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? HAVEN'T I EARNED IT? HAVEN'T I?
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what with the machine-gun-toting terrorist gang who robs a bank and cold-bloodedly kills the manager. Gwen Sterling happens to be in the bank, and the terrorist-robbers escape with her as a hostage just as ol' Jimbo arrives. He immediately becomes The Spectre and gives chase. At the gang's hideout, The Spectre animates the gang's emblem [a three-headed snake], which promptly crushes them to death. The Spectre reverts to his Jim Corrigan form and drives Gwen home, explaining for the four millionth time that he can't marry her because he is, after all, a dead man. He leaves her sobbing on her doorstep.

That night, Corrigan "restlessly paces the floor." Oddly enough, he's also smoking. That's odd because only on the previous page, he told Gwen that he doesn't even breathe. If he don' breathe, how's he smoking, mon?? Anyhow, he mulls over his—life[?]. Staring out the window, he thinks, "**Please**, release me from my **mission**! Let me be a real **man** again! Let me marry the woman I **love**! Please!"

Amazingly enough, Jim's prayers are answered. Only nobody tells **Jim** that. The next day, Jim is called to the scene where police have a hitman cornered. Jim quickly scales the fire escape to the guy's room, figuring "His bullets can't **hurt me**!"

Oh, really?

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Jim catches three bullets in the chest and shoulder. He gets off one shot, which [amazingly] kills the hitman, then topples from the fire escape three floors to the concrete.

SURPRISE!!

After a week or two in the hospital, Jim visits Gwen. He proposes. She accepts. An announcement hits the papers. Situation sound familiar? The dead hitman's boss, "Ducky" McLaren, sees the

WH-WHY, IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEBODY FOR-GOT TO FILL IN THIS GRAVE!
THAT BANGIN' COMIN' FROM INSIDE THE COFFIN!
NO TIME TO GET A SHOVEL! SOMEBODY'S BEEN(GASP) BURIED ALIVE!
THE OLD CARETAKER DUG FRANTICALLY, UNTIL HIS FINGERNAILS WERE CAKED WITH BLOOD. AND FINALLY...
!GASP! I NEED AIR! !GASP!
BAM BAM
GOOD LORD!

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Last page and above: Jim Corrigan dies a second death, but is sent back to Earth to continue his particular brand of crime-fighting.

announcement.

Uh-oh...

ADVENTURE #440 opens with Jim receiving a tip that McLaren and his gang want to give themselves up... but **only** to **Jim** and **Jim alone**!

Jim goes to the agreed meeting place alone.

Oh, Jim, **Jim**... I thought detectives were supposed to be **smart**...!

Needless to say, Jim gets his fool self shot to pieces by machine gun fire [Fleisher musta really loved machine-gun killings!].

Then, McLaren and the boys deliver Jim's bullet-riddled body to Gwen's doorstep, ring the bell and run. Gwen opens the door and the body of the man she was to have married the next day falls down on the floor. A note hung around his neck reads, "I was a pesky cop, I got what I deserved." Shock is also provided by Jim's eyes, staring outward in death. Oddly enough, Gwen has the stomach to roll him over on his back so that she can cry over his perforated body.

"A few days later, they buried **Jim Corrigan**."

James Brendan Corrigan, 1940-1975.

End of story, right?

Wrong.

That night, we get a virtual replay of the origin, except that Jim seems much more tormented this time. To Hell with vengeance! He wants his nice warm grave! But no such luck.

Jim is "rescued" from his grave by an old caretaker. Then, armed once again with the powers of The Spectre, he goes after his killers with a vengeance that makes the 1940s version look like **"The Wilderness Family Goes to Church."** When he appears before the gang, he introduces himself as "Lt. James Brendan Corrigan." After failing to kill The Spectre with their bullets, the gang tries to flee. But "Ducky" just **has** to have his rubber duck. The Spectre turns it into a 20-foot live duck which eats McLaren alive... and headfirst [think about how a duck chews and you'll look at this scene with renewed shivers!].

McLaren's men try to escape by car, but are confronted by a fifty-foot-plus Spectre looming up in front of them. He grabs the speeding car off the road and hurls it into orbit, where it burns up in the stratosphere. A little kid makes a wish on it.

Later, Jim shows up before Gwen. As you might guess, she's overjoyed to see him. Jim says that, "The world will be told that **Jim Corrigan** was buried **alive** by mistake... and **rescued** by an old **caretaker**!"

Right.

His chest was shot full of machine gun bullets. He was laid out for a couple of days, probably [most people are]. And nobody noticed the slightest sign of life. Sure. How lucky that his rich, rich girlfriend didn't have him **embalmed**! It's kinda hard to survive with your every blood vessel pumped full of formaldehyde.

Jim continues: "But the truth is that no man can escape his **destiny**! And my destiny is to be... **The Spectre**...!"

He fades away. Gwen weeps.

End of story. End of series.

And that's the way it was, **ADVENTURE COMICS #440**, July-August, 1975.

The Spectre starred in ten issues of **ADVENTURE.** In that time, he committed no fewer than **twenty-eight** brutal, often grisly murders. And with no remorse, no punishment, no atonement whatsoever.

This is a **hero**?

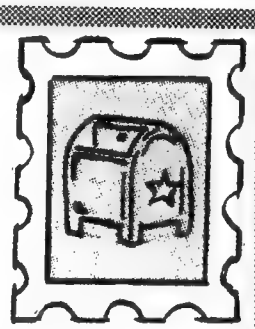
And all this was all in color for a quarter [or 20–] and Approved By The Comics Code Authority, folks! Yay!

In an interview last year, writer Harlan Ellison made remarks about Mike Fleisher which led to Fleisher's suing Ellison, interviewer Gary Groth, and Fantagraphics, Inc. [publisher of **THE COMICS JOURNAL**], to the tune of $2 million. The remarks allegedly implied Fleisher was crazy.

Well, maybe **I'm** crazy, too. The rough draft of this article was completed the night of March 30, 1981. After the senseless shooting of John Lennon December 8, 1980, coupled with the murders in Atlanta and today's equally insane attack on President Ronald Reagan which left Reagan, Press Secretary James Brady, a secret service agent and a Washington policeman wounded, I can't help but think...

Maybe, just **maybe**... this crazy world could use a Spectre...

Margaret O'Connell is a student in Comparative Literature at Princeton Graduate School.



WHY (SOME) WOMEN WON'T TOUCH COMICS

by Margaret O'Connell

So there I was, sitting on the floor of my beloved editors' spanking new office, reading a hot-off-the-presses copy of **LOC #1**, when suddenly my eye was caught by the provocative title, **"Why Women Don't Read Comics."** Eagerly I turned to the page listed in the table of contents, only to do a series of double-takes at author Carol Kalish's underlying assumption that the average woman or female child would even open a comic far enough to perceive that it fails to cater to her gender-specific entertainment demands in the various complex and subtle ways described. Rather than drag Carol away from the typesetting machine to splutter incoherently at her on the spot, I decided to put my response in writing [and get paid for it, to boot].

My experience may be somewhat atypical, at least among female fans [although the fact that there are still so few of these in itself suggests that what I'm about to describe may not be all that unusual within the population at large], but when I was a child in a little neighborhood in the big city [New York City, to be precise], during the 1960s, none of the little girls I knew read comics. I don't just mean they didn't read them regularly. To my knowledge, none of the female children of my acquaintance ever read a single issue of any comic or even expressed interest in doing so [at least, if they did, they never admitted it in my hearing, and they didn't have comics lying around in their rooms at home when I was invited over]. For all I know, none of the little boys did, either, but I'm willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, since my parochial school's boys-on-one-side-of-the-schoolyard, girls-on-the-other policy of sexual segregation ensured that I knew next to nothing about any of my male schoolmates' outside-the-classroom activities.

Besides, I did know that my neighbor Brian Kelleher, who was seven or eight years older than I was but had attended the same parochial school, read comics, because that was how I happened to read comics—in twice-annual binges of browsing through Brian's accumulated **ACTION**s, **SUPERMAN**s, and **LOIS LANE**s, while his mother cleaned out his room. Although I was very partial to Supergirl, and watched the **SUPERMAN** and **BATMAN** TV shows regularly [I preferred **SUPERMAN**], I never dreamed of actually asking my parents to buy me comic books of my own until a vacation trip we made the summer when I was almost eleven. Batgirl had made her debut on TV that year, so I teased my mother into buying me a **BATMAN GIANT** in a drugstore somewhere in Connecticut where we happened to be hanging around marking time until the local garage finished repairing our car, or something equally boring. My mother was extremely annoyed at being pestered into making another purchase for a kid who had already been bought ice cream before lunch, and I was extremely disappointed to discover that not only did Batgirl not appear in the book—her male cohorts didn't do anything terribly interesting in it, either. So, except for the **ARCHIE** and **JOSIE** comics that they gave away with child-size purchases at the local shoe store, I never attempted to acquire a comic book of my very own again until I had reached the advanced age of nineteen.

I took a very unscientific little survey among some non-fan female friends, relatives, and friends of relatives to find out if any of them had had similar experiences as children. It turned out that a number of them had, and that the members of this group-within-a-group all had certain other things in common as well. Here are a few of their experiences:

My nineteen year old sister Marie, who went to the same parochial elementary school I did up through the sixth grade, said that when she was

there, five years behind me, some of her classmates did read comics. However, more of those who did so were boys than girls, and their reading habits were considered slightly odd by their classmates. After sixth grade, Marie transferred to Hunter, a combination junior high and high school whose student body at the time she entered was entirely female. For the first few years she was there, nobody even in the seventh and eighth grades even dreamed of reading comics—it was considered very declasse [her choice of words]. However, by the time Marie was a junior and senior, the school had started admitting large numbers of boys in the entering classes, and it was not uncommon for seventh and eighth graders [though more boys than girls] to be seen carrying comics around with them in school, and even to patronize the fan-oriented Supersnipe Comics Euphorium, located about eight blocks away.

One of the problems with comics ostensibly aimed at women: the lead character was frequently made to look silly.

Marie's roommate MaryAnne, also nineteen, who also started out in a [different] Catholic school and transferred to a public one, confirmed that her classmates, too, had looked down on comic books. She herself had stopped reading comics by fourth grade and had no other comments. Marie's other roommate, Liz, also nineteen, who went to parochial schools in Long Island from the first through twelfth grades, considered herself "a closet comic book reader." At the schools she went to, reading comics was considered declasse, but it was less declasse for boys than girls, she said. Liz thought girls usually stopped reading comics before boys did because of social pressure. She herself "never admitted reading them to any great number of people; therefore, I could read them without any ongoing campaigns from friends trying to get me to 'kick the habit.'" Liz also cited the fact that she had a brother seven years younger than herself, "so I could read his and not have to commit myself by saying, 'Yes, these are mine.' My father still reads comic books [he keeps some on hand for the customers at the barbershop he owns, and Liz usually read some of the comics there] and my grandfather used to buy them for me all the time when I was very young [5-9]. At home there was no stigma attached to my reading them [although her mother once threw away 150 comic books she had in the basement on the grounds that they were a fire hazard]. At school, I simply never brought the subject up." In fact, Liz asserted that "the best thing to do is not to admit to reading comics, especially when asked by 'concerned' adults." Liz officially stopped reading comics last year, in her freshman year of college, but "when I go home I still read my brother's."

What all this suggests is that there are at least two kinds of subcultures where reading comics [an activity which has been perceived by some people as not quite respectable even for children at least since Frederic Wertham's 1950s campaign linking comic books with juvenile delinquency] tends to be viewed as as inappropriate, embarrassing, and something that simply Isn't Done. The first of these subcultures is the parochial Catholic environment. [The atmosphere at the higher-priced, non-neighborhood Catholic private schools seems to be somewhat more tolerant of comics-reading. This may have something to do with the fact that the families of children who attend such schools at the elementary level are generally more affluent and more firmly established in the community at large, as opposed to the tight, all-Catholic enclave of the parish, than families who send their children to local parochial schools.]

The second subculture where reading comics is considered dangerously declasse even among twelve- and thirteen-year-olds is an all-female environment like the traditionally all-girls public high school my sister attended, where the attitude toward being a known comics reader seems to have changed radically as soon as male students were admitted to the school in large numbers. [Note that pupils of both sexes in the younger, coed classes at this school seemed to find reading comics acceptable, while the older students in the all-female classes would never have dreamed of allowing themselves to be associated with such an activity in public, even when they themselves were seventh and eighth graders.] It should be also be noted that the inhibition against reading comics is strongest where the female and parochial Catholic groups intersect —that is, it is considered somewhat odd for anyone, male or female, to read comics in the parochial Catholic environment, but girls who persist in doing so are perceived as definitely odder than boys who do the same thing.

What the denizens of the female-dominated and parochial Catholic **milieu** would logically appear to have in common is a semi-subliminal conviction that their position in society is not secure and depends largely on the opinion of others, over which the individual has very limited control. As a result, people who are immersed in an environment which is either parochial Catholic or all-female and femininely-oriented [in the conventional sense] tend to have a greater than average anxiety about what impression they are making on other people, which in turn inhibits them from doing anything that may be perceived by those others as eccentric or undesirable.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that, in the words of psychologist Celia Halas, "Women [generally] place more emphasis upon others' opinions and acceptance than men do... This dependence upon others for their happiness increases their anxiety" [quoted in an article in the **WASHINGTON POST,** March 30, 1981]. As the linguist Robin Lakoff points out in **LANGUAGE AND WOMAN'S PLACE,**

"[traditionally] a woman's reputation and position in society depend almost wholly on the impression she makes upon others, how others view her. She must dress decoratively, look attractive, be compliant, if she is to survive at all in the world. Then her over-attention to appearance and appearances [including, perhaps, "characteristically feminine" over-correctness and over-gentility of speech and etiquette] is merely the result of being forced to exist only as a reflection in the eyes of others. She does not, cannot, do anything in her own behalf or purely for her own pleasure or aggrandizement...

...Men [on the other hand] may derive pleasure directly from their own works. Men do things purely for their own satisfaction, not caring nearly so much how it will look to others." [p. 27]

Although this may sound somewhat overstated now, since women's situation in society has changed somewhat since Lakoff's ideas first saw print in 1972, the recent PBS **NOVA** documentary "The Pinks and the Blues" demonstrated that girl children are still conditioned to be significantly more concerned with the approval of others, such as parents and teachers, than boy children, who are encouraged to be more self-reliant, psychologically as well as physically.

Nor is this a totally irrational response on the part of parents and other people who continue to inculcate children with such gender-differentiated values and priorities. Women have good reason to be more preoccupied with what others think of them than men are, since people are often quick to react with harsh judgments and disapproval when a woman makes a misstep or commits an offensive or even mildly unconventional action, when they would be much more understanding and accepting of the identical behavior in a man. According to an article

AND AS THE CULPRITS LEAVE UDER GUARD...
BUT WE COULD NEVER HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOUR HELP, KIM! YOU'RE THE REAL SUPER-HEROINE!
AND YOU'LL ALWAYS BE MY IDOL, SUPERGIRL!
©1981 DC Comics Inc.

Some stories did provide positive role models, both the super and non-super variety.

on female alcholics and drug addicts published in the **PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER** on February 22, 1981, "An addicted woman is regarded by society with far less compassion and understanding than her male counterpart. She faces a far greater social stigma than men do."

This double standard of disapproval applies especially strongly to any behavior conventionally perceived as inappropriate when the woman in question is in the public eye. Commenting on the possible repercussions of the revelation that Billie Jean King had had a lesbian relationship with her former secretary, a prominent East Coast advertising executive remarked,

"Advertisers are careful. When controversy arises, they'll back off if it looks like their product will be involved with it...

"It happens any time anything negative is said about anybody. It doesn't seem to affect men as much as women. They [men] can fool around, and it doesn't hurt them as much with advertisers. With women, unfortunately there are so few of them used [for endorsements], so few in the limelight compared to men, they must be above reproach, better than the men.

"...Because [Billie Jean King] is a woman, and because she's made the kind of money she has, she must be squeakier-clean than the men."

[quoted in the **PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER,** May 24, 1981]

Even relatively minor infractions of propriety, such as being impolite or using four-letter words, are still often considered more shocking in a woman than a man. A number of commentators, surprised by the flap over the profanity in the Paul Newman movie **SLAPSHOT** [which seemed relatively innocuous compared to some of the other films released

YOU NEVER WASTED ANY OPPORTUNITY TO ENRICH YOURSELF AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS!
AS WHEEL ADMINISTRATOR, I THOUGHT YOU'D FIGHT THE EMPIRE'S SCHEME TO FAKE REBEL ATTACKS SO THEY'D BE JUSTIFIED IN TAKING OVER THIS PLACE AND ALL THE WEALTH IT BRINGS IN...
--BUT THAT UGLY CHARADE WE'VE JUST WITNESSED PROVES YOU'RE GOING ALONG WITH THEM!
©1982 Marvel Comics Group

Princess Leia is another of the more positive role models in comics for women.

during the same period in the mid-1970s], attributed the outrage of audiences and reviewers to the fact that the author of **SLAPSHOT**'s screenplay was a woman.

But even granted the fact that women are generally more intimidated by the fear of others' disapproval than men are, and with some reason, why should this prevent them from reading comics? After all, reading comics is hardly in same league as alcoholism, lesbianism, or even using profanity when it comes to inspiring society's shock and disapproval—at least, not if the person reading them is still young enough to be perceived by adults as a child.

In fact, some women seem to have felt no anxiety at all about reading comic books as children. For example, Hilary, a fourteen-year-old attending a public school in Manhattan, said that she and her female friends still read **MAD** and used to read super-hero comics, but had pretty much dropped the latter by age eleven, perhaps for the reasons Carol Kalish cited in her column on "Why Women Don't Read Comics." [This supposition is strengthened by Hilary's further statement that unlike the girls, a lot of the boys in her class now are really into **X-MEN** and consider themselves incredibly cool for reading it. Girls sometimes read **X-MEN** over the shoulders of these boys, but when asked whether this was because of the comics or because of the boys, Hilary merely smirked knowingly.]

There are also cases like that of my graduate school roommate, Stephanie. Stephanie reported that where she lived as a child in Toronto, Ontario, all the kids read comics, but it was considered "tomboyish" for a girl to read super-hero comics. However, she did it anyway.

Then we come back to the parochial Catholic group. Judging from what I have seen of them, the kind of Catholics who send their children to parochial schools tend to be particularly politically and socially conservative, especially in their attitudes toward the role of women. Most of them are first-generation white collar, if that, and are acutely aware of having risen above the social status of their own parents, who were usually immigrants.

Parochial Catholics also tend to believe that their present relatively comfortable position in society, and the chances of further advancement for themselves or their children, are very precarious and easily jeopardized by the most trivial deviation from the norm. For instance, the nun who taught my third grade class warned us to behave by citing the horrible example of a little boy whose third-grade 'C' in Conduct later caused him to be rejected as an applicant for the F.B.I. [This was in 1964, when the F.B.I. obviously had a much better image than it does today.] When I was an undergraduate at Columbia University and proposed to write an April Fool's Day article for the college newspaper reporting that the president of the university had been turned into a frog, my parents were unalterably convinced that this minor jibe at the administration [which President McGill would probably have regarded as innocuous light relief compared to the vitriolic denunciations of him and his policies which routinely appeared on the editorial page] would result in my being blacklisted for life. They became so agitated and distressed about this that I finally had to abandon the idea entirely.

Historically, the parochial Catholic group also has some justification for its obsessive concern with conforming to accepted standards of behavior down to the most minute detail. Having been treated as outlandish outsiders to "normal" society in the immigrant and immediate post-immigrant generations, ethnic Catholics understandably became preoccupied with making themselves over to fit the image of white bread, picket-fence pseudo-WASP ordinariness they imagined to be the all-American norm. The authoritarian structure of the Catholic Church, which has tended to be suspicious of any deviation from the accepted way of doing things, and to value punctilious conformity with detailed

codes of behavior dictated from above over more individualized virtues, provided further reinforcement for this attitude. For most parochial Catholics, the result is a genuine terror of eccentricity of any kind, fed by their uneasy conviction that even when they try with all their might to be perfectly average by **LEAVE IT TO BEAVER** standards, they still aren't quite as thoroughly accepted in the mainstream of American society as their Protestant neighbors.

All this painstaking attention to the problem of how to be just like an idealized Everybody Else seems to have caused parochial Catholics to internalize Wertham's decades-old warnings about the aberrant influence of comics much more thoroughly than those segments of the population who felt secure enough in their social status to take the supposed four-color threat to their children's future as productive members of society less seriously. As a result, there seems to be a smaller number of Catholic male comics fans (which presumably reflects a lower rate of casual comics reading among Catholic males generally) than the percentage of Catholics in the total American population (in the neighborhood of 25%) would suggest there should be.

As stated earlier, Catholic women, for whom the inhibitions against reading comics, or doing anything else which might be perceived as eccentric, are even stronger, rarely read comics at all, and tend to regard it as a shameful secret when they do, as shown by Liz's policy of keeping silent about the subject and denying everything when confronted. The general female tendency to strenuously avoid risking the disapproval of others, so heavily reinforced by the specifically parochial Catholic anxiety about conforming to the all-American ideal, can also be intensified into a formidable conviction that reading comics is dangerously declasse through immersion in an all-female environment characterized by essentially conventional attitudes, and presumably by other factors as well.

Obviously, all of these conclusions are highly speculative, since they are largely based on my own personal experiences and those of a relatively small cross-section of my circle of acquaintances. In order to get more representative data about the four-color reading habits (or lack of them) of women, Catholics, and comics fans in general, I will need your help. Please fill out the accompanying Comics Readership Questionnaire (or a xerox of it) and send it to me, Margaret O'Connell, care of **LOC**. If you want to be indispensably helpful above and beyond the call of duty, get some of your friends who don't read comics to fill out copies of the questionnaire and send them in, too. I will tabulate your answers and report on them in **LOC** as soon as deadlines and volume of reader response permit. The results should be quite interesting.

Section I
1) Male_____ Female_____

2) Age _____
2a) I live in
A) the U.S.
B) Canada
C) somewhere else (please specify) _____

3)
A) I consider myself a comics fan
B) I read comics regularly, but do not usually read fan publications (for example, **COMICS FEATURE, THE COMIC READER, THE COMICS JOURNAL, LOC**)
C) I occasionally read comics
D) I used to read comics, but don't anymore
E) I have never read comics (or only read two or three in my whole life)

4) (you can circle more than one answer if appropriate)
A) A lot of other kids I knew read comics
B) A few other kids I knew read comics
C) Most of the kids I knew thought it was weird or dumb to read comics if you were over age _____
D) Most of the kids I knew thought it was weird or dumb to read comics at any age
E) Most of the kids I knew thought it was a little weird for boys to read comics, but very weird for girls to read them
F) Most of the kids I knew thought it was okay for boys to read comics, but not for girls.

5)
A) Both my father and mother read comics as children
B) Neither of my parents read comics as children
C) My father read comics as a child, but my mother didn't
D) My mother read comics as a child, but my father didn't
E) One or both of my parents still reads comics

6) (you can circle more than one answer if appropriate)
A) My parents bought me comics without my asking them to
B) My parents bought me comics if I asked them to
C) My parents bought me comics only if I pestered them to
D) My parents thought it was okay for me to read comics
E) My parents thought it was okay for me to read comics until I was age _____, but after that they disapproved of it
F) My parents didn't approve of my reading comics at all
G) My parents tried to prevent me from reading comics

7) I grew up in
A) a small town
B) a medium-sized town
C) a city
D) the country
E) a military base
F) we moved around from one place to another

8] I was raised to think of myself as
A] a Protestant
B] a Catholic
C] a Jew
D] a Muslim
E] other [please specify] _____
F] my family didn't feel any ties to any organized religion

9] I was raised to consider myself
A] white
B] black
C] Hispanic
D] Oriental
E] Native American
F] other [please specify] _____

--AND ANOTHER FIVE, IF YOU WERE LUCKY, BEFORE YOU WERE PICKED UP! STILL WANT TO GO AFTER I CHING NOW?
YES!
OKAY, THEN--THERE'S ONE WAY YOU MIGHT MAKE IT--BUT FIRST WE'VE GOT TO SEE A MAN I KNOW!
BY THE WAY--DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE I CHING MIGHT HAVE GONE?
HE ONCE SAID HE HAD OLD FRIENDS IN A VILLAGE CALLED ASHAI! THAT MIGHT BE A GOOD PLACE TO START!
3
©1982 DC Comics Inc.
The Diana Rigg-inspired adventures of Diana Prince in the early 1970s won many fans.

10] I was raised to consider my family
A] upper class
B] middle class
C] working class
D] poor

11] My parents were
A] strict
B] easy-going
C] in between

12] I spent grades 1 through 8 at
A] public school
B] parochial school
C] private school
D] started out in parochial or private school but transferred to public
E] started out in public school but transferred to parochial or private

13] My elementary school was
A] strict
B] easy-going
C] in between

14] My elementary school was
A] coed
B] all boys or all girls
C] officially coed, but kept the boys and girls apart as much as possible [for example, made boys and girls sit in separate rows in class, stay on different sides of the schoolyard during recess, etc.]

15] My junior high/high school was
A] coed
B] all boys or all girls
C] officially coed, but kept the boys and girls apart as much as possible [see above]

Section II [do this section ONLY if you used to read comics, but don't anymore]

16] I stopped reading comics at age _____

17] I stopped reading them because [you can circle more than one reason]
A] I got tired of them
B] I felt I was too grown-up to read them any more
C] I thought the comics being produced had gotten so much worse since I used to like them that it wasn't worth it any more
D] because of pressure from parents
E] because of pressure from friends and classmates
F] for some other reason [please specify] _____

_____

Section III [do this section ONLY if you have never read comics]

18] I never started reading comics because [you can circle more than one reason]
A] because I didn't think I'd find them interesting
B] because my parents disapproved of them
C] because my friends and classmates thought reading them was weird or dumb
D] for some other reason [please specify] _____

_____

Section IV

If you have any comments about any of the above, please write them here.

-COMING SOON-
FROM
NMP

ADVENTURE

ILLUSTRATED

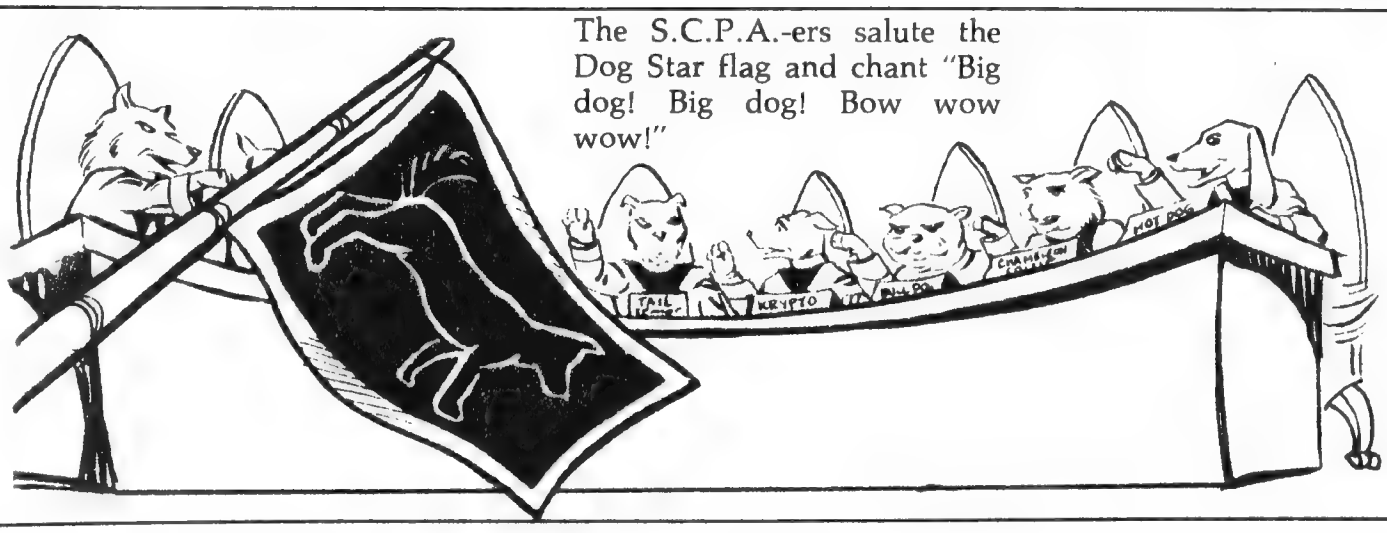
EVERY SETTING
EVERY TIME
THE FINEST ARTISTS
THE BEST SCRIPTS
ALL WITH ONE THING
IN COMMON:

ADVENTURE!

A LOC Special Report

THE SPACE CANINE PATROL AGENTS

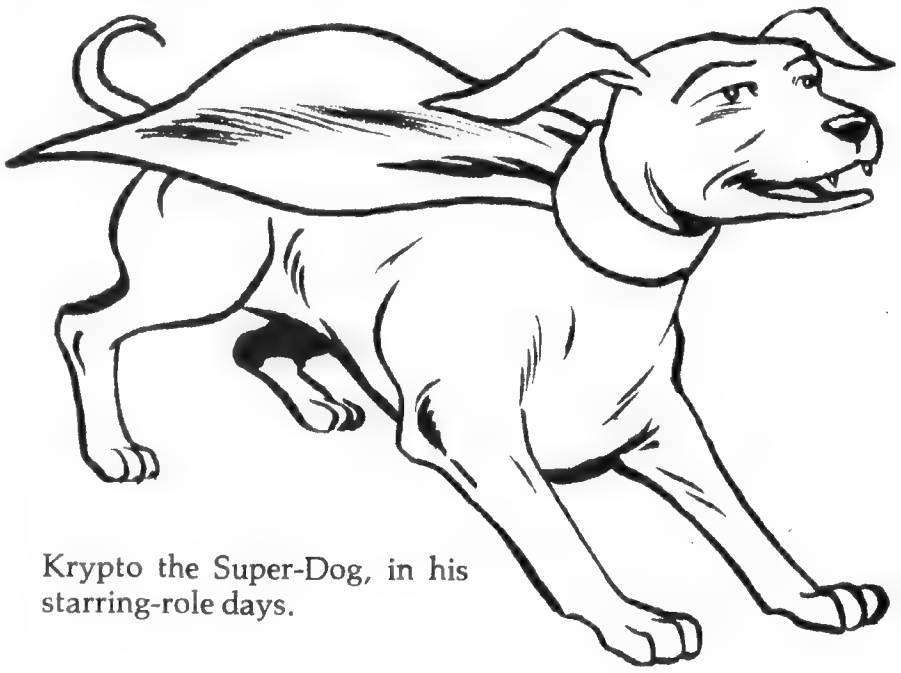
by Richard Howell



The S.C.P.A.-ers salute the Dog Star flag and chant "Big dog! Big dog! Bow wow wow!"

One of the recurring charges made against the Mort Weisinger-era **"Superman"** comics is that they were silly. No matter how many real virtues one can find in their tight, entertaining one-issue-length-at-most stories, the fine and tremendously **suitable** artwork by the likes of Curt Swan and George Klein, Kurt Schaffenberger, and Jim Mooney, and the complex and painstakingly consistent background built up around the "Superman Family" of characters, there still remained the fact that many, **many** of those stories were just plain **dumb**. [One would think the creators of such stuff would realize it, wouldn't one?]

Standing, however, head and shoulders above the month-to-month moronic morass of Giant Turtle Olsens, "for-their-own-good"-style cruel hoaxes, and Lois Lane's never-ending plots to plant neutron bombs in Clark Kent's lunch pail to prove whether or not he's really Superman, is a short feature called **"The Space Canine Patrol Agency"** [featuring Krypto, the Super-Dog].

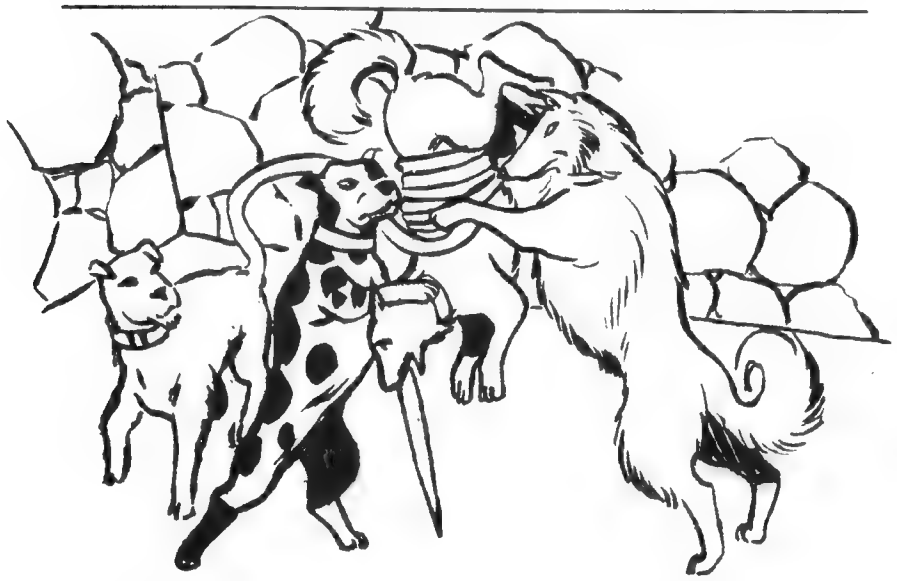


Krypto the Super-Dog, in his starring-role days.

The **"S.C.P.A"** series seemed to be based on two separate trends: first—naturally—was the **"Legion of Super-Heroes"** series then running in **ADVENTURE COMICS** [which, for the uninitiated, featured the exploits of a group of heroes, each with different powers], and the **BATMAN** TV show craze, during which comics were assumed to be ridiculous—and the more ridiculous they were, the better. Under that definition, the **"S.C.P.A."** stories were works of art.

The series began in **SUPERBOY #131** [July, 1966] in a story entitled **"The Dog from S.C.P.A."** [I almost forgot—James Bond-mania was just passing its peak and every comics character at DC was part of and/or fighting a Bond-esque group: Lois Lane fought S.K.U.L.; Jimmy Olsen became "Agent Double-Five" [for J-i-m-m-y [5] and O-l-s-e-n [5]], Bob Hope fought T.O.T.E.M., Aquaman fought O.G.R.E., etc.] Krypto is left by Superboy to patrol Earth when the Teen of Steel is called into the future to aid the Legion of Super-Heroes. On his patrol, Krypto chances upon a giant balloon dog in the stratosphere. While Krypto is wondering when they transferred the Thanksgiving Day Parade into outer space, the balloon dog is punctured by a long-range missile. The dying dog informs our hero of the S.C.P.A. [of which, as Mammoth Mutt, he is a member], and enlists Krypto's support against those murderous missile-firers, the Canine Crime Caper Gang. Things get worse fast. Krypto meets

the C.C.C.G., who have robbed candy-striped dinosaur bones [bones are assumed to be treasure beyond measure in this canine **milieu**] and are transferring them into their "fido fortress." Krypto figures he'll get captured and be thrown in with the other S.C.P.A.-ers, so, after defeating the monstrous **doggysaur** [yes, doggysaur], he feigns defeat and is tossed in with the other captured dog do-gooders: Tail Terrier, Tusky Husky, Chameleon Collie, Hot Dog, Bull Dog, Paw Pooch, etc. They offer him a stick of gum. [Yes, it's assumed here that dogs chew gum.] As skilled readers of Mort Weisinger-edited comics know, these stories do **not** feature any throwaway bits, so **any** extraneous element [Perry White going on vacation on page one automatically means that he's the mystery character who arrives on page four, etc.] will have great bearing on the plot. The gum, unbeknownst to the S.C.P.A.-ers, contains Kryptonite, and the gum-chewing Krypto, naturally, becomes "mysteriously" weakened. In the S.C.P.A.'s



The endangered doggies prepare to spin their top dog, Tusky Husky, through the floor in their effort to escape from the "fido fortress."

escape, the gum is knocked out of Krypto's mouth, he regains his powers, and imprisons the C.C.C. Gang on a world of space **cat** patrol agents [somehow affiliated, no doubt] such as Atomic Tom, Crab-Tabby, and Power Puss. After being inducted into the S.C.P.A. as an honorary member, Krypto rejoins Superboy on Earth just in time for an ironic "wouldn't my master be surprised...?" ending.

The plot of this particular story is nothing special [Kryptonite gum? Dogs **chewing** gum?], and the art is merely typical of the type of bland charm which George Papp regularly delivered in his work in **SUPERBOY**. What made **"The Dog From S.C.P.A."** memorable enough to warrant a return appearance was its unrelenting dumbness delivered without a **hint** of a campy snicker. Scenes with Krypto attempting to disguise himself by donning glasses, dogs turning into centipede-like canines, the doggysaur, even the S.C.P.A.'s escape from

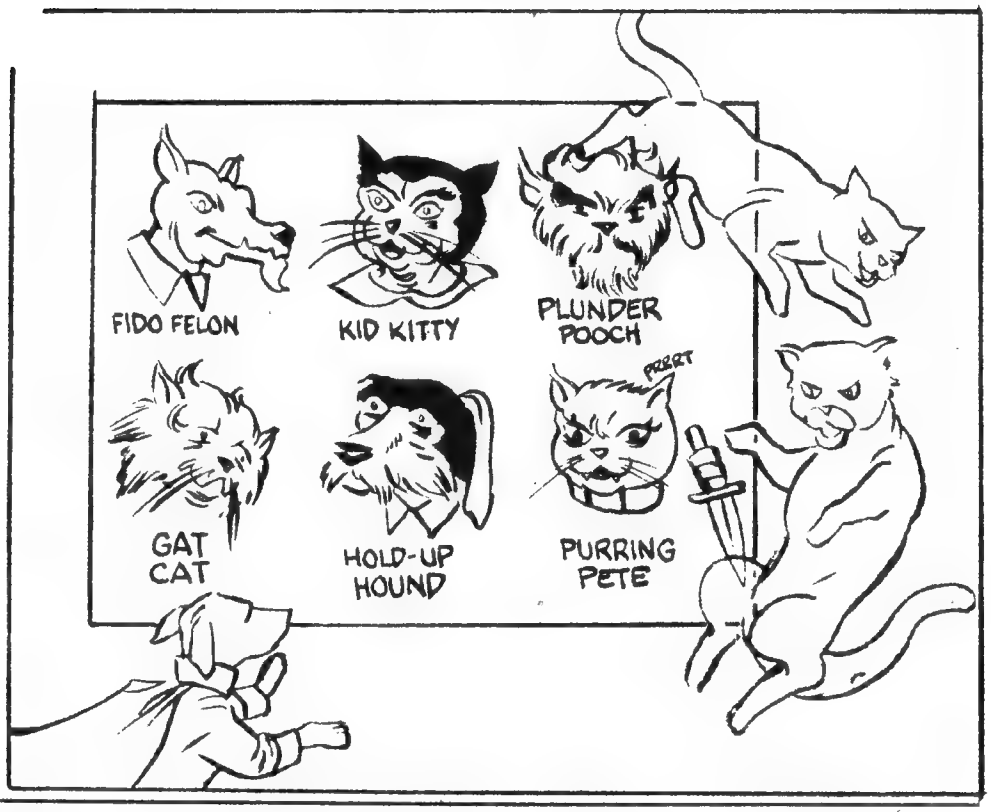
The tragic death of Mammoth Mutt—at the paws of the C.C.C.G.

prison [which involved standing Tusky Husky on his enlarged front tooth, winding Tail Terrier's elongated tail several times around him, and spinning old T.H. like a power drill] were each delivered with an absolute **absence** of self-parody.

The same creative team [writer Otto Binder and artist George Papp] was pressed into re-creating their initial triumph in **SUPERBOY #132**'s **"Krypto's Cat-Crook Caper,"** in which Krypto and his canine compadres battle the Cat Crime Club. This second **"S.C.P.A."** story introduced such concepts as the Canine/Feline World [on which various marginally-anthropomorphic breeds of cats and dogs hold sway], the S.C.P.A. HQ [a huge doghouse, naturally], the Cat Crooks themselves [whom artist Papp attempts manfully to present as evil and conniving, yet who rarely appear to be more than cute pussy cats who walk on their hind legs], and the immortal S.C.P.A. salute [shown at the

Krypto versus the doggysaur.

beginning of the column], in which the doggy detectives raise their right forepaws and chant, "Big dog! Big dog! Bow Wow Wow! We'll stop evil! Now Now Now!" Various indigenously silly scenes abound, as with the S.C.P.A. fund drive collecting tender [which really **is** tender] from the Canine/Feline World [looks like bones and Little Friskies to me], and a Cat Crimester defeating the S.C.P.A. by enticing Krypto into eating a hot-dog [incipient cannabalism?] topped with "Kat Ketchup" [and actually laced with Red Kryptonite]. The S.C.P.A.'s "Meow and Mutt Gallery" of evil-doers must be seen to be believed, especially that arch-fiend "Purring Pete" [the happy killer].



The Phanty-Cats hover menacingly around the S.C.P.A.'s Rogue's Gallery.

The third **"S.C.P.A."** tale followed—wagging the dog—in **SUPERBOY #136**, and was cover-featured [Superboy himself made an appearance in the story, and naturally his scene made the cover]. Like its predecessors, **"Decoy of the Doom Statues"** featured a fast-paced parade of dog puns, LSH take-offs, and mind-numbing dumbness. S.C.P.A. applicants Hoodoo Hound and Prophetic Pup are introduced, as is the evil Black Cat Gang, and the menace of the giant fleas, and...well, you get the idea. This story wins the S.C.P.A. dumbness award hands down for the introduction of the "Phanty-Cats...pet cats of Kryptonian criminals [who] were exiled with them in the Phantom Zone." These three transparent tabbies aid the Black Cat Gang in trapping Superboy and Krypto on an island of Kryptonite statues [but they are rescued by an autograph hound, wouldn't you know?].

The saga of the S.C.P.A. ended after these three stories, despite good reader reaction. According to then- [and now-] Assistant Editor of **SUPERBOY**, Nelson Bridwell, he and Mort Weisinger decided that the series had become **so** ludicrous it should be cancelled due to lack of sense. I wouldn't spearhead a campaign for the S.C.P.A.'s return, myself, but it is interesting to note that the letter columns which pertain to the dogs' stories are favorable, and sales for the **"S.C.P.A."** period took a dramatic rise.

Krypto is duped into eating "Kat Ketchup" by a pernicious pussy-cat. This animalistic evil gives the reader paws...er, pause.

The market has changed, though, and stories in which Krypto is treated as anything more than a dog are now the exception to the rule. Would today's audience sit still for anything quite as strange as **"The S.C.P.A.?"** I don't know. Maybe Gerber will change his mind and include spectral kitty-cats in the **PHANTOM ZONE** mini-series...

Perhaps we could all hound Julie Schwartz...

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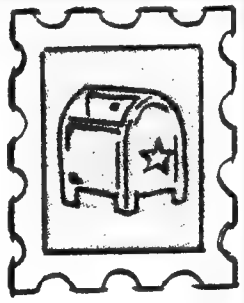


Through the Looking Glass: THE DEATH OF *SWORD OF SORCERY*

by Joel Thingvall

The year is 1973. **SWORD OF SORCERY** entered the comic scene. I know. I read it in its comic book format. You read it too? It was the year the people at National Periodical Publications [DC Comics] didn't take a moment of their time to read the book. Slings and arrows were loosed. Faf and the Grey Mouser were gunned down on the open road that stretches across the heartland, make that gutland, of the psyche. This time a "zap" came that the book was to be canceled, before the first issue hit the newsstands. Number five would be the last.

What happened?

Don't those folks read comics? Didn't the powers that be pick up on the implications of this comic book? Didn't a multitude of fandom people agree that **SWORD OF SORCERY** was the giant number-one seller comic roaring into the arena of artistic excellence straddling a flaming lavender gargoyle? "Go on, Mouser! I'll wait for as long as it takes." These are the same people that published **STRANGE SPORTS** and **PREZ** and **CLAW THE UNCONQUERED**. Who **is** screwing up this industry?

SWORD OF SORCERY, shaped by Dennis O'Neil from the dust of Fritz Leiber's earth and one of Howie Chaykin's ribs, suffered, in my mind, a bloody martyrdom, the victim of comic book economics' counter-revolution to make a buck, shot down in flames because it gave us a vibrant approach to graphic storytelling with every page. The book was praised as the definitive adaptation of Leiber's words to picture format, as well as the hammer that drove the stake into its heart before the first issue ever reached newsstand distribution.

Why, oh why, do the powers want to cancel a book before it is distributed, and then keep extending its extinction more than the issue after the present one?

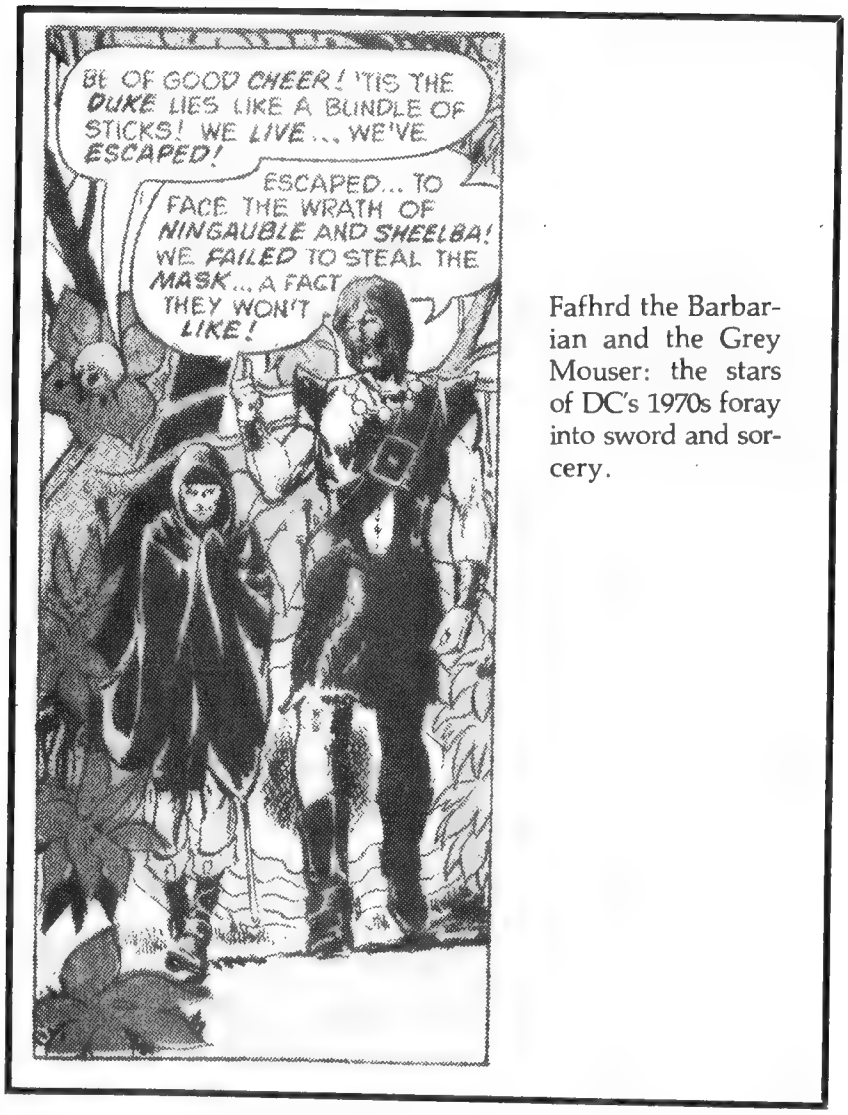
Granted, **SWORD OF SORCERY** was attacked for its faults. But all criticism dealt with the bor' on an intellectual level, not accepting it as an entertainment publication, a philosophical and cultural point for the under-25 reading public. People either laid on the licks because **SWORD OF SORCERY** glorified the fantasy world of swashbuckling way beyond the strata absorbed from reading **CONAN** or else one grooved on it for pretty much the same reason.

It was surrounded by much free talk about the emergence of a talented new artist in 1973 and his uninhibited approach to the world of storytelling compared to the regulars of the past decades. Fine, but was it **SWORD OF SORCERY** alone that fired this shot around your friendly neighborhood newsstand? How about **CONAN**? Didn't that follow a similar pattern in its time? Didn't that turn on kids? Didn't it turn the super-being market into one dealing with horror and fantasy dream worlds of swashbuckling barbarians?

Barbarians. Sword and sorcery. That's what it is. Super-hero books are passe. They don't hold up no more. Superman and Captain Marvel and Batman are not needed to sell a magazine, or are they? Look at the predicted and final end of **SWORD OF SORCERY** and the answer is quickly formulated.

Back to Howie Chaykin. He followed the popular design of the 1970s decade of cartoonists. Small pictures that don't rap with you right away, just the kids who buy most of these picture books. As far as pictures go, Nick Fury and his super-agents were drawn with tiny ornate panels and made it big—until the style and direction changed.

If you read public relations into Faf and Mouser, you get a vision of these two fighting their way through untold death dangers only to die because of a


BE OF GOOD CHEER! 'TIS THE DUKE LIES LIKE A BUNDLE OF STICKS! WE LIVE... WE'VE ESCAPED!
ESCAPED... TO FACE THE WRATH OF NINGAUBLE AND SHEELBA! WE FAILED TO STEAL THE MASK... A FACT THEY WON'T LIKE!

Fafhrd the Barbarian and the Grey Mouser: the stars of DC's 1970s foray into sword and sorcery.

publisher's hatchet on the production schedule. You almost looked forward to issue number five and hoped Faf and Mouser would be mounted on a horse, looking back and saying good-bye to the reader as Conan did upon the leaving of Barry Smith from his artistic beauty parlor. It could be worse, though. The local distributor could have totally avoided sending the book to your local drugstore for developing...

Well, the question is why does a publisher shut off the creative valve of a book before the reading public can react to it. Can the publisher predict that a book is so stylishly out in left field, so hopelessly cinema-major in design, artsy-craftsy that the public will revolt and reject the book? No, not hardly. If they can predict that, why publish or even commission the work in the first place?

How avant is a garde that uses puns whenever the plot thickens. You saw it maybe in **BAT LASH**.

Or what about those sparkling cities, our two heroes running through jeweled halls into the radiant splendor of a Gordon Parks landscape. Those of us in the Lone Ranger under-ground jive with that.

Or maybe one digs glory-stomping, dust-kicking, raunchy, ratchety, bump-you-out-of-your-seat wizard stories? You won't find it in **SWORD OF SORCERY**. Why? Because the book was strictly sword and sorcery.

Picture Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser gliding along side by side like Rock Hudson and Sandra Dee on water skis—that's what you get when you mount your trusty reading chair and watch Howie Chaykin run his pencil from panel to panel. It caused old-wave fiction lovers to look on Faf and Mouser with fond nostalgia. Certainly, if it was compared to Edgar Rice Burroughs' work and the writings of Robert E. Howard, it would seem to have a place right on the bookshelf.

Maybe it wasn't the technique employed, but the story that put those publishing giants off. Too ephemeral. Too hard to find. It was, wasn't it. What issue you ask? Come on, dive in and see for yourself. It is about two guys who go looking for fun and find it—with trouble. Thin stuff. I could see those comic book executives dozing off during endless panels written by hack writers. Like, say, the Tuesday night presentation by the Boring Chapter of the National Geographic Society. After an hour or so you might ask yourself: Where in the devil is all this going?

Or, better yet, why?

Or, still better yet, does it matter really?

There is, after all, only a certain amount of breathtaking beauty the human soul can endure. Then you start crying out for plot, interaction, direction, a purpose that's meaningful. Yet, ironically, Dennis O'Neil was tossed into the book. The best dialogue writer in the business thrown in to calm all feelings, I imagine. His scripts, simply, were dialogued fantastically.

The theory seemed to be that the best scripter honor is an award innocuous enough to be tokened off as a peace offering without compromising anything important. Besides, the competition has always been strong. There's the Roy Thomases, Len Weins, Steve Engleharts, Gerry Conways, Steve Gerbers, Archie Goodwins, Bob Kanighers, Cary Bateses, John Byrnes, Stan Lees, Jack Kirbys, Jim Shooters and countless other both past and future. Still, **SWORD OF SORCERY** could have been left to someone less qualified. Best technical achievement in lettering perhaps.

Maybe the powers up in DC-land saw through the emperor's new clothes. Maybe they saw that **SWORD OF SORCERY** wasn't really a good comics magazine. Not even a manifesto on the comics medium. After all, what point does Faf and Mouser and Leiber and **SWORD OF SORCERY** manifest? It so loaded the dice that the lovable, scroungy, indigent peddlers of thievery are brutally, improbably, gratuitously hounded by the law-abiding forces of this or that favored realm, automatically prompting the lovable, scroungy etceteras into martyred sainthood with them dying as comic book characters in discontinuation.

Dead before being born.

Dying before actually produced.

This was, in the early 1970s, cheap. Only a dime a body, which with inflation and everything wasn't

too bad.

But examine it as a comic book. Does it play? Think not? What didn't people like about these harmless vagabonds? Fafhrd, your comic relief, life of the party drunk [Yahoooo!] giant. Grey Mouser, your campy carney freak in floppy suede. You mean to say that's as serious as the rogues who threaten castles and lords and wizards with their daggars and demons of doom are? So, ice them off as being funny-looking, harmless non-conformist clowns.

I don't buy it.

YOU KNOW, SMALL ONE--LIFE IS AN ENTERTAINMENT! FULL OF DELIGHTS... SURPRISES...
I NEVER IMAGINED I'D BE...FLYING!
--TO DANGER--
TM & ©1981 DC Comics Inc

Dennis O'Neil's scripts and Howie Chaykin's art provided the perfect atmosphere for the pair of heroes. Little was impossible in the land of Newhon.

And how could a publishing empire not think no one else would buy it. I think that the doom of a magazine, the dying doom of a whole fleet of comics publications did bring, was the possible notice that an industry is dying. Slowly, the continuous illustrated picture story format will disappear as delight and entertainment.

SWORD OF SORCERY was a delight. **SWORD OF SORCERY** was an entertainment. I know the book was rushed through production, considering the initial effort was handled by a confluence of inkers. **SWORD OF SORCERY** was gloriously slanted to appeal to the **CONAN** audience. The itty bitty glittering backgrounds. The shiny swords and daggers. Destined to be a popular hit before the reading kids even open the cover. It had excellent art, finely tuned dialogue, fast-paced storytelling, all molded into a product that couldn't possibly sell because it was not given a chance by the higher-uppers.

When the magazine appeared back in 1973, it sold out. I don't know, don't care [really], if it was the money-hungry, wheeling-dealing fanatics who stocked up on the mag, or the dyed in wool science fiction and adventure buffs who formed a line outside the newsstand waiting for the truck to drop off the twenty copies so he could savor one and buy another one for the future...so the kids could go to college.

I suppose that if sales were like this across the nation, they had a little champagne party in the New York Hilton.

Never given a chance.

Sic transit. The world of sorcery, with a little sword.

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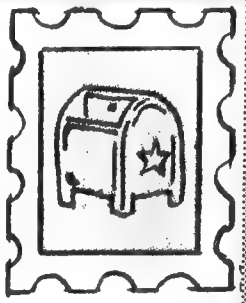
THE ALL-NEW, ALL-DEAD X-MEN



by Darren Madigan

With issues **#**141 and 142 of **THE X-MEN**, Chris Claremont and John Byrne gave their readers one of the more intriguing concepts to come along in comics for quite a while. The idea of a world in which the fiendishly implacable Sentinels have actually triumphed and wiped out most of North America's mutants (not to mention all of the other costumed super-beings, as well) is really quite fascinating. Unfortunately, the story is so flawed by mistakes and inadequacies that it collapses under the weight of its own mediocrity, leaving its readers with a meaningless mishmash of tripe which accomplishes absolutely nothing beyond the celebration of the authors' apparent beliefs in their own creativity and infallibility.

The story opens with a middle-aged Kitty Pryde standing in the ruins of Park Avenue. Kitty, now known as Kate, looks like a typical denizen of a typically horrible and desolate future, dressed as she is in patched green coveralls and surrounded as she is by the remnants of what was obviously a once proud and mighty city. Her thought balloons and the captions bear this out; the future is bleak and awful and so far, indistinguishable from any other bleak and awful future the reader will have doubtless seen. From there, things start happening fast and furious. Kate is ambushed by "rogues," who also look like typical weird-thug-scavenger types from that typically desolate future. While she is being ambushed we are told that Sentinels are in positions of authority, that rogues hate Sentinels almost as much as they hate mutants, and that Kate is wearing an inhibitor collar that keeps her from using her mutant power of phasing through solid objects. Wolverine then shows up to rescue her in a very atypical (for Wolverine) manner; he knocks the rogues out instead of cutting them into coleslaw. We are instantly told, however, that this is not due to his acquiring some morality over the years; rather, it's due to his not wanting to let the Sentinels know that he's in the neighborhood by leaving distinctively mutilated corpses around. He and Kate talk about some plan, he gives her a "jammer component" and they each go their merry ways.

On the way back to the "mutant internment camp" where she lives, Kate passes by all sorts of bleak and depressing things, like trolley cars being pulled by horse teams, etc. During all this we are told by captions that the Sentinels, aided by the passage of something called the Mutant Control Act of 1988, have taken over North America and generally made it into a really lousy place to live . . . so lousy, in fact, that we are told that the millions who have died since the bill's passage are the lucky ones. Once inside the camp, we are treated to a view of the camp cemetery, a huge thing that apparently takes up more space than the living quarters do. Though this scene is obviously meant to be powerful and hard-hitting, with lines like "as always, the first thing she sees is the cemetery. As always, there's a fresh grave," as well as the graves of all our favorite characters from Ben Grimm to Scott Summers, it comes off as so much dramatic overkill that it almost seems like parody. There are too many graves of too many characters there for you to take it seriously, especially since in the panel at the bottom of page five showing the names on the headstones, it's obvious that there is barely a foot of space between each grave.

It's on page six, though, that the silliness really starts popping up with a vengeance. First, Magneto shows up in a wheelchair (Kate obligingly identifies him for us by shouting his name for no discernable

LATER...
FRANKLIN...?
I'M MAKING THE FINAL ADJUSTMENTS, SIR.
AS YOU KNOW, THESE INHIBITOR COLLARS WE WEAR NEUTRALIZE OUR SUPER-POWERS. THIS JAMMER SHOULD NEUTRALIZE THE INHIBITORS.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

An example of clumsy writing for the sake of filling in the reader: If magneto already knows what the inhibitor collar does, why is Franklin telling him?

reason]. Why he's in a wheelchair is never made clear, though one would suspect it's so that the surviving X-Men will identify him with Prof. X and thus not beat him up. Amazingly enough, this apparently works, as Colossus calls him "old friend" and all the others seem to have completely forgotten that this megalomaniacal mutant has done his level best to humiliate and/or kill all of them at some point in the past. It may be feasible that the X-Men would work with Magneto in this situation, but I cannot see them accepting him in so familiar a fashion—nor can I see Magneto wanting them to, as he really **is** a megalomaniacal old boy. We are also shown a grown-up Franklin Richards and told that he and his lady Rachel, a telepath/telekinetic, are also members of The X-Men. Franklin's power or powers we are never told, but that comes later. On page seven, Franklin prefaces a speech to Magneto with the phrase "As you know ...". He then goes on to explain something that we readers needed to know, i.e., that the machine he's working on will neutralize their inhibitor collars long enough for them to use their mutant abilities to get them off. However, Magneto's reply should have been, "Yes, I **do** know all that, and you know I know it because you just told me I know it, so why are you telling me this?" After this, Rachel uses her powers to send Kate's mind back in time to inhabit her thirteen-year old body, at the same time bringing Kitty's thirteen year old mind into the future.

Page ten takes us back to the present, just in time to see Kitty Pryde walk into the middle of an ongoing Danger Room session. For someone who is constantly reminding people of how precocious and intelligent she is, Kitty seems to consistently act like a complete moron. Either that, or Storm and Professor Xavier are being criminally negligent in letting the kid anywhere near the Danger Room at any time. Yes, the door is always open, but there should be standing orders to Kitty not to enter the Danger Room at any time—there have been enough equipment malfunctions in the place to make it dangerous even when it's supposedly shut down. Not to mention the fact that Kitty should know enough not to go in the damn place, anyhow. On page eleven, panel three, Wolverine has a nice line—but there's no way that Wolverine [**Wolverine**, for the luvva Pete!] should call Kitty "pun'kin." The fact is just absolutely at complete odds with everything we know about his character. As if this isn't bad enough, immediately afterwards we're subjected to a barrage of different pet-names for the little twerp. Apparently, only Colossus actually calls her Kitty; everyone else has some sickeningly cutesy nickname for her. It's almost enough to make you go back to reading Archie Comics.

Then, after being told in one word balloon a Very Important Fact [i.e., that Prof. X has gone to Washington for some "mutant hearings"], we are treated to Sprite's first danger room run.

Let's review for a moment, shall we? Kitty Pryde's mutant ability is the power to "phase through" solid objects, right? In other words, what she's basically got is working intangibility. So what is in the Danger Room run that Professor X spent weeks setting up, specifically for Kitty? Disruptor beams? Sonic janglers? Confusing light shows? **Anything** that could conceivably pose a challenge to an intangible person? No. There are giant sandbags, grabby tendrils, trap doors [oh, she can also walk on air, so these don't bother her, either], big padded steel clobberers from the wall. . . and that's it. Nothing that could even bring a furrow to her fevered brow. Is it possible that Professor Xavier simply doesn't know what her power is, or has he been secretly lobotomized by Magneto?

Either way, it doesn't matter much, as at that moment the mind transfer takes place and Kitty "drops without a sound." Storm and Colossus look aghast, and in the ensuing panels, Storm comes perilously close to wigging out entirely simply because one of The X-Men happened to faint unexpectedly. This is a team leader? Kitty wakes up with

Kate's mind and proceeds to tell The X-Men that unless they prevent The New Brotherhood of Evil Mutants from assassinating Senator Robert Kelly, the typically bleak and desolate future that she's just come from will come into being. The X-Men trundle off to Washington to check out her story, and en route she tells us the horrifying tale of how her future came about. This culminates in cutting back to the future, where the surviving X-Men have broken out of their prison and are trying to wipe out The Sentinels before The Sentinels can cause a nuclear holocaust. We are told that Magneto stayed behind to cover their escape, as his wheelchair slowed them up too much. This is idiotic,

SENATOR, IN ALL HONESTY, I FAIL TO SEE THE NEED FOR THIS HEARING, OR YOUR CONCERN.
THE NEED IS SIMPLE, Dr MacTAGGERT. I MERELY WONDER IF-- IN A WORLD OF BEINGS LIKE Dr DOOM, MAGNETO, THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THE AVENGERS, AND LORD KNOWS HOW MANY OTHERS--
--THERE'S ANY PLACE FOR ORDINARY MEN AND WOMEN.

Senator Kelly, out to eradicate mutants, rationalizes his actions.

©1981 Marvel Comics Group

as [a] Magneto is by far the most powerful of the lot of them and should be taken along even if they have to carry him, and [b] Magneto can fly, so with his powers back, he shouldn't **need** the silly wheelchair. The next thing that happens is that Franklin Richards gets fried by the Sentinels. It's almost enough to make you wonder why he was in the book in the first place. He doesn't get to do anything, we never find out what his power is, and when he dies, nobody cares. Oh, his lover complains that she felt him die in her mind, and Storm tells her to stop whining and fight. Beyond that, no one even remarks on Franklin's vaporization, not even with a stray thought. The X-Men really have become calloused, apparently. In the next panel, even Franklin's lover stops mourning him and starts wiping out Sentinels.

The resultant battle culminates in Colossus' dropping a wall on the remaining Sentinels, at which point we are told that "The robot's screams are frighteningly human . . . but Colossus does not care." No, no, no. Robots do not scream. They just don't. They are machines, they have no emotions, they do not feel fear, and they do NOT scream.

Now we go back to the present, to be introduced to The New Brotherhood of Evil Mutants . . . and a dumber bunch of Evil Mutants you never saw. The Blob is the only one in the group with a halfway decent power; the other are just silly. Someone lies to us about Avalanche's power; Claremont tells us on page 23 that his **touch** crumbles inanimate objects, while on page 26 Byrne shows us that he can crumble things apparently just by gesturing. In order for Pyro to be effective, he has to wear flamethrowers into battle, and once he's done that, he might as well simply blast people with the things as make big monsters out of them. Destiny is a blind pre-cog with a crossbow, and Raven is a limited shapeshifter—and they're going into active combat with The X-Men? Oh, sure. Face it . . . with a little bit of luck, Wolverine alone could take out this entire team except for The Blob . . . so why can't the entire team of X-Men beat them after an entire issue of trying? On the final page of #141, Wolverine claims that his team of X-Men is better than the original—but somehow I doubt that the original X-Men would have spent more than three pages beating The New Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

Issue #142 opens with a symbolic splash that quickly recaps what has happened in the previous issue. On the second page, we are re-introduced to The New Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. Once more, we are told that Avalanche's mutant ability is the power to disintegrate inanimate objects with a touch, and once more, on the next page, this is completely refuted by his use of his power. On the next page, Destiny helps Avalanche take out a madly bamfing Nightcrawler by predicting where he will be next and telling Avalanche to strike out at that point. Doubtless this stunt sounded plausible when Claremont and/or Byrne thought it up, but if you look at it logically, it's not. Though Destiny could no doubt look a split-second into the future and determine exactly where Nightcrawler will be then, the idea of her communicating that knowledge to Avalanche in time for him to do anything about it is somewhat ludicrous—especially when you consider the fact that Avalanche is being beaten up at the time and is probably not concentrating too closely on what Destiny is telling him, as well as the fact that Avalanche can't be anywhere near as coordinated and agile as 'Crawler is, even if he weren't wearing that bulky suit of armor. On that same page, Wolverine starts acting in his typically homicidal fashion by going after Pyro with claws out and blood in his eye. However, Wolverine has never been stupid, and he is supposed to have quite a bit of experience at combat, so why does he wonder what will happen if he punches his claws through Pyro's flamethrowers into his stinking hide? He should know that if he does this, the high pressure flamethrowing chemicals in Pyro's flamethrower will explode, instantly killing them both. Apparently, Professor X is not the only X-Man who has been mysteriously lobotomized.

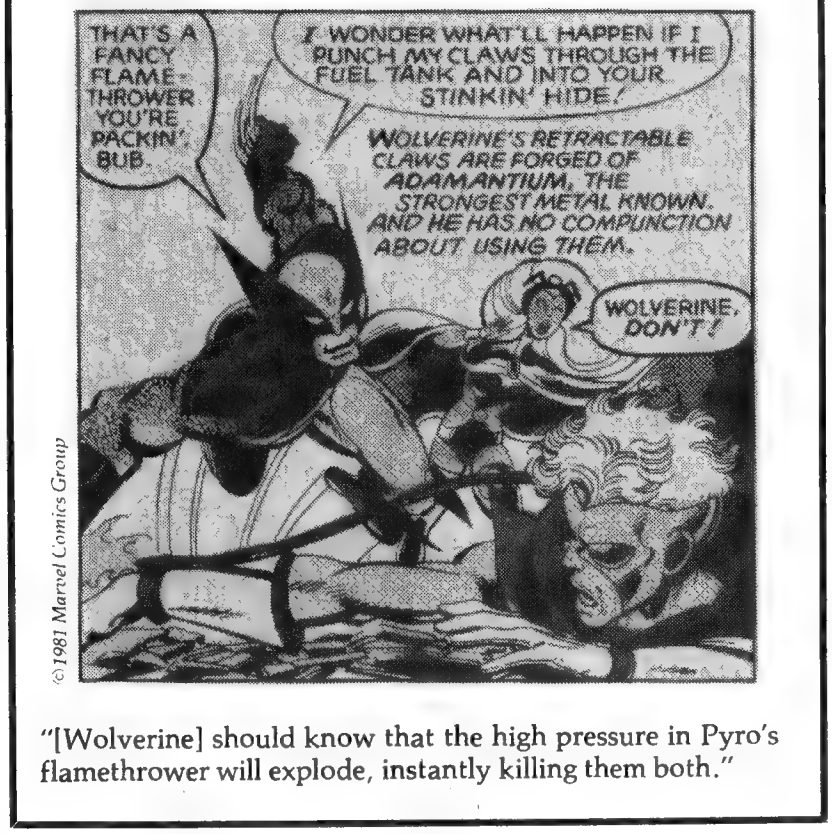
On page seven, we are told the Angel's reaction to Wolverine's psychotic binge. Is it understandable horror that his maniac is loose in the world, unrestrained, apparently condoned by his fellow X-

HALF PAGE: $35.00

Men? No. He's just worred about appearances—"with the country's growing anti-mutant sentiment, the last thing we need is Wolvie carving someone up—even if it is a villain." Oh, my, what conscience. Normally, it seems, letting Wolverine carve up a villain would be fine—but not where the peepul can see. Immediately following this, Professor Xavier and Moira MacTaggart are hoaxed and gassed by a disguised Mystique, who is wearing an electronic damper field to keep the Professor from reading her mind. This brings up two interesting questions. First, why is it that none of the X-Men are capable of using their powers effectively except at crucial moments? Back in issue #124, Cyclops spends most of the issue futzing around ineffectively; then, when the chips are down and he needs a break desperately, he displays "a unique, inborn talent for spatial geometry—honed by months of practice in the Danger Room—that makes him aware of the exact position of every car in the room—and tells him exactly what firing angle will enable him to destroy them all with a single optic blast." This is an ability he had never shown before and has never shown since, but he sure had it when he needed it. In a very similar fashion. Professor X only detects Mystique's damper field when it's too late—obviously, if he'd been using his telepathic scanning powers in a fashion that any intelligent man would be using them when surrounded by enemies, Mystique wouldn't have been able to take him out and this would have messed the story up. Rather than mess the story up, Claremont and Byrne simply mess the character up.

But I said that this raised two questions. The second one is, "Where are all these super-villains getting all these hideously powerful psionic machines from?" In issue #134, we were told that Jason Wyngarde [alias Mastermind] has been able to fool Phoenix [only the most powerful telepath/telekinetic ever shown in modern comics] with the help of a "mindtap mechanism" developed for him by the White Queen. Now, Mystique shows up with a damper field capable of foiling the powers of the second most powerful telepath ever shown in modern comics, the same telepath, in fact, who was largely responsible for the initial defeat of Dark Phoenix. This is some kind of powerful machine Mystique has here! Did the White Queen make it, too? [And if she did, why doesn't she make one for herself, which would be the intelligent thing to do?]

From here, we cut back to the future, to see how the X-Men of the 21st Century are doing. Basically, they're doing fine. We see them start to infiltrate the Sentinels' main base, the Baxter Building [nice touch, that—pity Franklin couldn't be left alive to see it]. And then we're back in the present day, watching the X-Men, still fumbling around with the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. On page 14, we


THAT'S A FANCY FLAME-THROWER YOU'RE PACKIN', BUB.
I WONDER WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF I PUNCH MY CLAWS THROUGH THE FUEL TANK AND INTO YOUR STINKIN' HIDE!
WOLVERINE'S RETRACTABLE CLAWS ARE FORGED OF ADAMANTIUM, THE STRONGEST METAL KNOWN. AND HE HAS NO COMPUNCTION ABOUT USING THEM.
WOLVERINE, DON'T!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

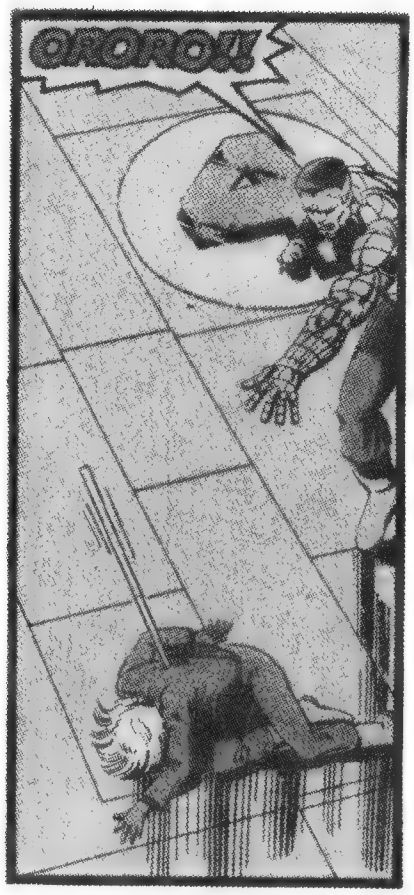
"[Wolverine] should know that the high pressure in Pyro's flamethrower will explode, instantly killing them both."

discover that the Blob has been training himself to manipulate his mass—according to him, anyhow. This brings up the question of how does one train to use a power one doesn't have? On page fifteen, the Blob declares that he could probably trash all of the New X-Men all by his lonesome. After the performance that they've been putting on, it seems very likely that he's right—and in the team that he's currently in, it's a good thing for him that he is.

Nothing more of particular interest happens until page eighteen, when we discover that Colossus apparently has a super-power that no one knew about until now—that is, the ability to ignore the Blob's mutant power of immovability, which he then demonstrates in the three panel sequence at the bottom of the page. Despite the fact that when the Blob doesn't want to be moved, he doesn't get moved, Colossus is still able to shove an I-beam between his legs and hurl him into the air. Apparently, if you don't know exactly what someone's mutant ability is, you don't have to deal with it. If this extends to the X-Men's other enemies, this could come in very handy. Colossus would no longer have to worry about Magneto, Mastermind, Proteus, the Hellfire Club, or anyone.

Two pages after this, the X-Men finally manage to give the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants a so-so defeat. [Actually, both teams end up running away from the Army, but the Evil Mutants don't run fast enough and they didn't get to assassinate Senator Kelly, so the X-Men won. Sort of.]

Now, it's back to the future, for the part of the story that Claremont and Byrne obviously had the most fun doing: the much-vaunted Deaths of the X-Men.



"Perhaps Claremont and/or Byrne thought it wa appropriate that a former African goddess should be run through with a spear; I personally found it in incredibly bad taste."

First to bite the dust is Wolverine. Hurled at a supposedly unwary Sentinel by Colossus, he is flash-fried in mid-air when the Sentinel turns out to be not so unwary as he'd thought, leaving nothing but a few ashes and his famed adamantium skeleton for his friends to mourn over. Storm flies into a berserk killer rage—Wolverine is obviously much more important than Franklin was—and starts trashing Sentinels right and left, only to be impaled on a wooden spear from behind by more Sentinels. Perhaps Claremont and/or Byrne thought it was somehow appropriate that a former African goddess should be run through with a spear by Sentinels in 21st Century New York: I personally found it to be in incredibly bad taste. But to each his own. Colossus then also goes berserk with grief, punches a Sentinel out of a window—and we cut back to Rachel, on the ground below, guarding the unconscious adult form of Kate Pryde. She is monitoring the battle telepathically, and thus tells us when Colossus dies—neither Claremont or Byrne, apparently, could think of an interesting way for him to die, so he doesn't even get to croak on panel. If you weren't reading carefully, you could miss his death entirely.

This is the last we'll see of the future, as from now on its back to the present to wrap things up. Sprite saves Senator Kelly from the humiliation of being shot down by a blind precog in a ridiculous costume holding a crossbow. He responds to this by yelling a lot. A disguised Mystique shows up just in time to see Destiny being taken away. Professor X is wheeled in and is still obviously not using his powers intelligently, or else he would spot Mystique [or at least her electronic damper field] where she is lurking, just outside the room. And, in the end, we are told that "cliche as it sounds, only time will tell" whether any of this confusion and chaos actually did any good. Wonderful. Nothing like definite endings to make you feel like you've accomplished something.

Finally, in our epilogue, we find out that either Senator Kelly is under the mental control of someone or he's simply the most irrational man on

I AM STORM, LEADER OF THE X-MEN. AND I SUSPECT THIS...CHILD IS THE PERSON WHO JUST SAVED YOUR LIFE.
MUTANTS, LIKE PEOPLE, ARE BOTH GOOD AND BAD. YOU WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT, SENATOR, BEFORE YOU SEEK TO CONDEMN US ALL.
S-STORM...?
PROFESSOR, THE AUTHORITIES ARE COMING. I MUST LEAVE.

The moral of the story, from the second part.

the face of the Earth, as, despite his life's being saved by the X-Men, he still blames mutants for its being endangered in the first place. We also discover that Sebastian Shaw, that dastardly dastard from the Hellfire Club, is being commissioned by the government to build a new series of Sentinels. And who is he working under? Why, none other than our old friend from the Avengers, Henry Peter Gyrich, who, as far as we know, knows absolutely nothing about mutants, Sentinels, or anything that has anything to do with the project that he's supposed to be in charge of. He **does** know how to be a raving fruitcake and how to make a real nuisance of himself, and I guess those are the only qualifications he really needs. What?

In retrospect, then, the Future X-Men stories, though good in concept and well-executed in places, have far too many flaws and lapses in quality to ever be considered really good comics. Though many of the problems pointed out in this article could, taken by themselves, be called trivial and unimportant, when weighed all together they clearly show that the two issues were glaringly inadequate and put together in an inexcusably shoddy manner. The general reaction I had once I was all done reading the story was "So what?"... which tends to make me think that the story really wasn't worth the effort of reading in the first place.

Kathleen Glancy is a Scottish writer for Britain's leading fanzine, *BEM*.

KATHOLOCITY

by Kathleen Glancy

Quote from **WORLD'S FINEST #250**, Green Arrow to Black Canary: "I love you kid... and I always have."

Always? Even while she was still married to Larry Lance?

Quote from **WORLD'S FINEST #251**, Black Canary narrating: "Oliver Queen is one if the reasons I came to Earth-1."

Was he? Fascinating. She told everyone at the time it was to escape the memory of her just-deceased husband. Didn't she? On looking up the appropriate issue of JLA, one finds another interesting quote. "Not a nice way to treat a lady," observes Green Arrow, aiming a shaft full of goo at the Canary, "But I've seen that particular lady tie professional wrestlers into knots." Just **when** he was privileged to view this is shrouded in mystery. They were never on the same fighting team in any of the previous JLA/JSA cross-overs. An unrecorded meeting?

Let us give the pair resident on Earth-1 the benefit of the doubt. On Earth XXX, however, a world with such a large population of super-heroes that it has a Justice **Brigade**, there is an interesting divorce trial taking place before Judge Thick. The Court has been closed to reporters because of the spare-time work of several of the people involved, but it is well-known that a determined snooper from Earth-Prime can get in **anywhere.**

Clerk of the Court: All rise. His Honor Judge Thick.
Judge: Hrm, yes. What's next? Ah, yes, Lance versus Lance and Queen. They drew lots for this one, and I lost. Are all parties present?
Clerk: The Lances are, your honor. Mr. Queen, it says here, was inadvertantly dropped into a time-warp by a friend over 8 months ago. They've been trying to get him back, but with no luck so far.
Judge: I have never heard such an improbable reason for not being in court. What was he doing near a time-warp, anyway?
Clerk: It **says** he was pursuing his hobby of archery at the time, when his friend, who was pursuing **his** hobby, described here as "ring-slinging," got hit on the head by a yellow rock and let him fall.
Judge: Let's leave that. My head's starting to ache already. Now, you three lawyers are . . .?
L-1: Repesenting Mr. Lance.
L-2: Representing Mrs. Lance.
L-3: Representing the Trustees of Mr. Queen's estate, which is in a hell of a mess since the legal provisions for people lost in time-warps are vague in the extreme. My instructions are to deny that he was necessarily involved in this at all.
L-1: Ha!
L-3: Ha! to you, too!
L-1: Your honor, my client and his wife were married 5 years ago. They were quite happy, until...
L-2: Objection! **His** client may have been happy. Mine was bored stiff after six months.
Judge: Sustained.
L-1: Oh all right, **he** was happy, until two years ago, when Mrs. Lance joined a free-lance—no pun intended, your honor—group of law enforcers calling themselves the Justice Brigade. There she was able to give free rein to her interest in unarmed combat. Unfortunately, there she found another interest to give free rein to. Mr. Lance suspected nothing for a long time...
Judge: I thought he was a detective.
L-1: He's not a very **good** one, sir. He suspected nothing, even when his wife took to staying out at nights, and refusing him his marital rights because she was too tired. He believed her when she said

DINAH...DINAH, HONEY... LOOKS LIKE WE'VE LOST, BABE/ JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW...
I LOVE YOU, KID... AND I ALWAYS HAVE.
HOLD ME, OLLIE, AND WHATEVER HAPPENS...
...DON'T LET GO...
c.1981 DC Comics inc

"*Always?* Even when she was still married to Larry Lance?"

she'd been doing extra crimefighting. When she started talking in her sleep, and made frequent mention of the name of Oliver, he believed her when she said the Lionel Bart musical had made a great impression on her mind.

Judge: You're right, he's **not** a good detective, is he?

L-1: But when she gave birth to a blond green-eyed child, on a date some 11 months after they had last had relations to the best of his memory, he **stopped** believing her.

Judge: And people call **me** thick!

L-1: When the Infant Future Aptitude Prognosticator, invented by the famed eccentric scientist Prof. Potter, was applied to the child and he was found to be a born archer, my client knew where to seek the other guilty party. Namely, down a time-warp. We tried to summon the other "Brigadiers" to this court, since they must have known about his association, but they are all out scouring the time-warp. We got **one**, however, in Gotham City. Call Batman!

Clerk: Yoo-hoo, Batman!

Judge: Don't be facetious. You sir, why are you dressed like that?

Batman: To strike terror into the hearts of the underworld, sir.

Judge: Oh, anyone got an aspirin?

L-1: Batman, what do you know about the association between my client's wife and Oliver Queen?

Batman: Nothing.

L-1: Nothing! You noticed **nothing** unusual about their behavior?

Batman: Only a tendency to fall asleep at meetings, which I put down to too many night patrols.

L-1: You are supposed to be the world's best detective...?

Batman: So I am. Doesn't mean I go about prying into my friends' private affairs all the time.

L-1: Ha! Affairs! Was Mrs. Lance not distraught at the time of the time-warp incident?

Batman: We were **all** distressed. It was an awful thing to happen. Besides, when he went he was carrying the only key to the Brigade HQ's men's room. You've no idea how long it can take even **me** to pick a lock in some circumstances.

L-1: But Mrs. Lance was the worst upset, was she not?

Batman: I assume that the early stages of pregnancy were making her nervous.

Judge: How pregnant was she then?

Batman: Two weeks, your honor.

Judge: Then, how did you know?

Batman: Elementary, my dear judge. **If** you're the world's greatest detective, that is!

L-2: Your honor, my client is not now attempting to deny her guilt. It's the third party that's saying it wasn't their man. My client only wishes to state that there were extenuating circumstances. First, it must be obvious to all that Mr. Lance is not the most exhilarating of men. Nevertheless, both she and Mr. Queen did attempt to fight their mutual attraction at first. But when they were captured by the famed mad scientist Dr. Light, who held them hostage and kept them locked in the same cell for two weeks, their resolution cracked. Simultaneously, half-way through the fourth day, to be precise.

Judge: These mad scientists have no consideration. What about the pregnancy, Mr. Williams?

L-2: An accident, your honor. As soon as this hearing is over we proceed to Courtroom 4 to sue the Acme Pill Company. An associate of my client, The Flash...

Judge: Is that the New York Flash, presently on trial for indecent behavior in Courtroom 5?

L-2: Certainly not. This one is a respectable widower who never behaves indecently, in Courtroom 5 or elsewhere. He analyzed the pills in question and found them defective.

L-3: Your honor, much of the case against my client rests on the parentage of this child. Our contention is that fair coloring and an inborn talent for archery do not conclusively point to only one possible father. If you will permit me to use this machine provided by the famed slightly dotty scientist, Prof. Pepperwinkle, we will prove this.

Judge: Why is this case beset by mentally unstable scientists, however famed? Oh, all right, go ahead. Excuse me while I take another aspirin!

L-3: With this Interdimensional Caucasian Toxophilic Probe, we shall soon—ah!

Judge: Arrrggh! That nearly...hit me! Whoever **he** is, arrest him for contempt of court!

Hawkeye: Look, if you haul me away from a fight you'll just have to put up with flying arrows. Who the heck are you, anyway? Where is this? Why am I here? If it's Kang again, I swear I...

L-3: Please be calm, sir. If you'll just help us with this case, we will put you back where you came from straight afterwards. Could you take off your mask, please? Your honor, please note the coloring. Now, sir, are you your world's greatest archer?

Hawkeye: Sure.

Judge: That's a matter of opinion. He nearly hit **me**.

Hawkeye: I was actually aiming at Godzilla originally. You want me to just stand about while New York was eaten? Anyway, watch!

Judge: Arrrgggh!!!

Hawkeye: There! Split the first shaft in two. Convinced?

Judge: Nearly hit me **again**. Oh, my head! Mother always wanted me to become a doctor...

L-3: You see, your honor, **this** man might have been the father!

Hawkeye: Not with **my** luck with women—though I'm sure it would have been a pleasure, ma'am!

L-2: But my client has never met him, before today!

L-3: He could have a counterpart on this world.

Hawkeye: Can I go home now? I would rather fight Godzilla than stay in this madhouse any longer!!

Judge: So would I, but I haven't got any choice.

L-3: The machine seems to have gone a bit funny—No! Put me down!

Dr. Fate: Allow me. Begone to your own world, archer!

Judge: Now what? Wasn't he once taken in for illegal fortunetelling?

Dr. Fate: My name is Fate, mortal. I thought it best to re-open the time-warp here. Right, Superman, bring him back!

Judge: Why me, Lord? **Oh** my head.

Green Arrow: Why've you brought me to a courtroom, Super? I would rather—oh, hi, honey. Don't tell me dimwit's finally caught on.

Judge: Mr. Queen, I presume. I won't even ask why he's dressed like that.

GA: I wish I'd been dressed differently. I landed in Nottingham in the reign of Richard I, and spent two weeks dodging soldiers who mistook me for someone else. And Sherwood Forest was worse yet; when Supes finally found me I was having a hell of a job besting the Gay Men!

Judge: You mean Merry Men, surely.

GA: You didn't meet them.

Judge: Enough! I have had enough. Nobody could be expected to live with anyone with such lunatic friends. Divorce granted. Go away, all of you, before I go completely irreversibly mad!

GA: Excitable, isn't he? It's good to be back after such a rough few weeks. Incidentally, Dinah, whose is the kid?

Judge (ten seconds later): I will not have people fainting all over my court!

Respectfully dedicated to Thorne Smith—for obvious reasons.

Kathleen Glancy's *"Katholocity"* is a regular feature in Britain's leading fanzine, *BEM*, which will soon be distributed in the United States by New Media Publishing Services, Inc.

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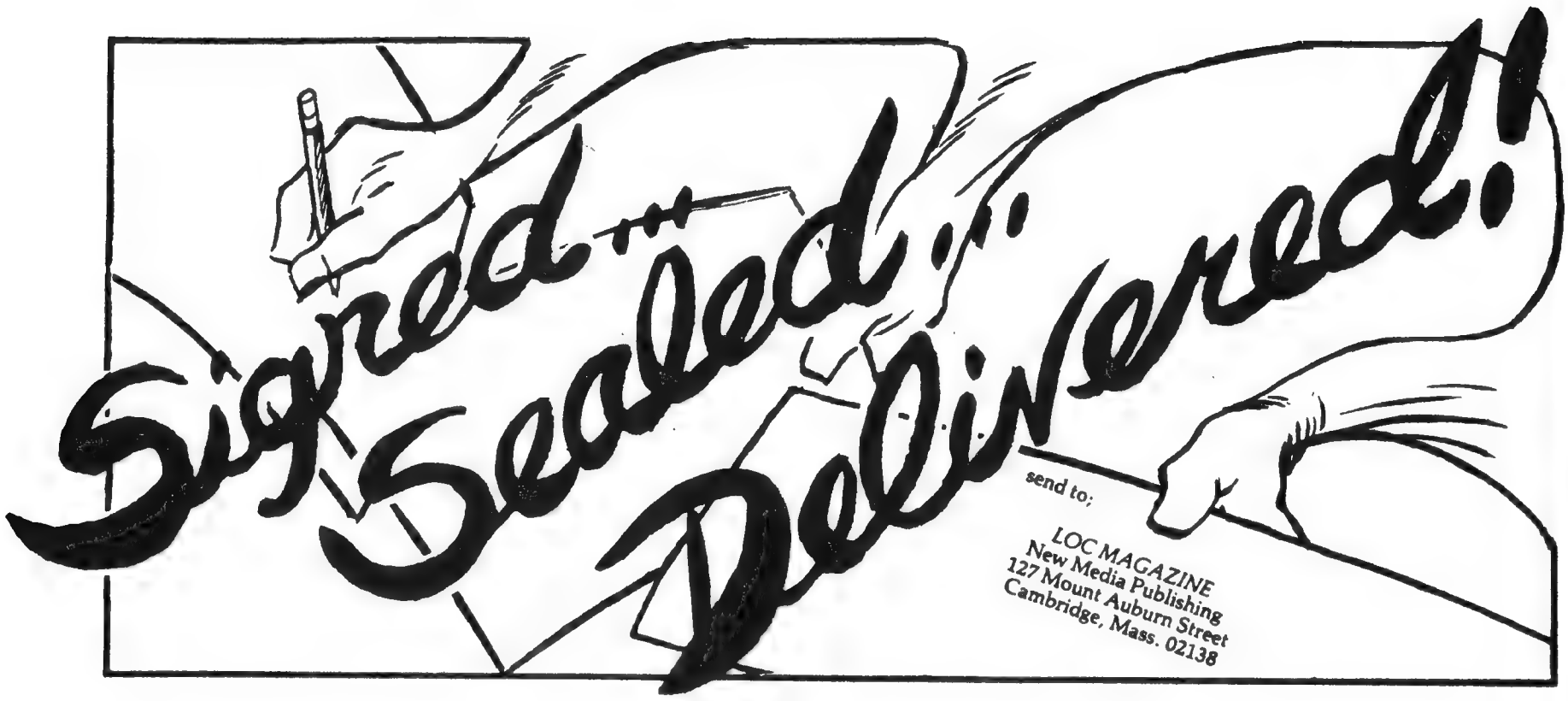


Gary Dunaier
Flushing, NY

Thanks for printing my letter in **LOC #3**. [How is the name of the magazine pronounced? I know "Loc" is an abbreviation of "letter of comment," but how have you been pronouncing the name? When I read it, I mentally pronounce it "loke."]

I still think having the year on the cover is important. If the cover is too crowded, either get rid of the names surrounding the logo, or make the month smaller and put the year under the month. Another suggestion is to do what DC did in the late 1930s—put the number, month and year across the top of the cover.

The **"Flash Gordon"** comic strip parody of the movie was a waste of space, and uncharacteristic of the rest of the magazine. What would be interesting would be someone's opinions about fandom expressed in comic strip format.

Now that comics have gone to 60¢ [20p in England], the Marvel diamond symbol is getting more cramped. Look, you almost need a microscope to see what issue you're reading—the number has gotten so doggone small!! If man could put a $15.00 price tag of **NEW TEEN TITANS #1**, why can't he design an attractive direct-sales logo? I also disapprove of the Spidey head in the UPC box. I would like to see something different. I am enclosing a sketch of what I feel would make a better number/date box and UPC box.

The Russ Cochran interview was pretty good. I'd like to see interviews with other people in fandom; Fred Hembeck, Gary Groth, and Mike Tiefenbacher spring to mind.

Why must comics say "address withheld by request if a writer wishes his address withheld? Come on, will a letter lose any of its importance if a writer doesn't want his street address published? Will a letter gain any validity if it's announced that **the writer asked for his address to be withheld?** On behalf of my opinions, I hereby give the "address withheld by request" policy, as well as the similar "no address given" policy, the "Spine Roll Award" of 1981, to Marvel. [I'll also give Marvel the 1981 "Missing Staples Award" for its policy of diminutive direct-sales numbering.]

I don't think, Gary, that Marvel is particularly worried about giving its letterhacks more or less validity. It's simply a manner of protecting both the letter writer and themselves simultaneously. If a person feels that the potential for getting mail isn't important to him or her, there's no reason for that person's address to be printed; the "address withheld by request" tag simply lets the readers know that it's the writer, and not Marvel, who made that decision.

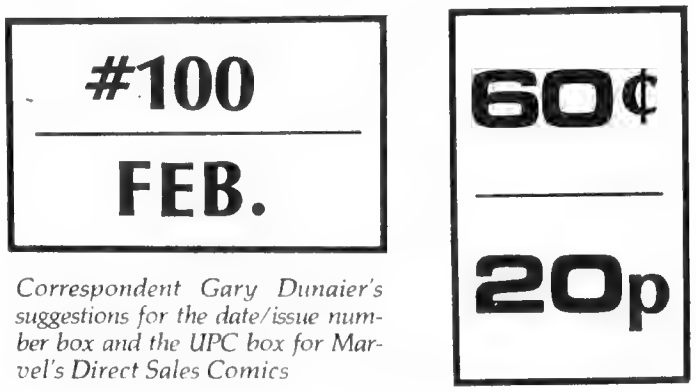
On the other hand, your suggestion for Marvel's direct-sales cover format garnered some support around the office. The only objection I could see Marvel having (besides inertia) for not using it is that it put the price in an area where folks don't usually look for it —but it's certainly large enough to be visible. But roughly half of the space in the date box is being wasted by the diamond, and it would be nice if Marvel could find a more space-efficient way of putting all that information in

and still letting people read it without a magnifying glass.

We wish that you had gone into a bit more detail about why you disliked "Flush Going"; it would make it easier to respond. Remember, though, that LOC is a commentary magazine, and commentary can take many different forms. We do like your idea of having a comic strip about fandom; we'll see what we can do.

And we appreciate your comments on the Russ Cochran interview. We are looking to continue the series, perhaps occasionally doing something a bit different every so often. All of your suggestions there are worth while—it's up to them. We'll try and persuade them.

You've probably noticed the addition of the year on the cover. With the circle we'd been using for the date and number, it was a bit cramped; with the stamp, though—an idea so obvious, I'm surprised no one thought of it earlier—it's no problem at all. And we've been pronouncing the title of the magazine "lock," though it took a while for us to settle into it.



Correspondent Gary Dunaier's suggestions for the date/issue number box and the UPC box for Marvel's Direct Sales Comics

Michael Burkhalter
La Jolla, CA

It has been four months since I read **LOC #1** and Carol Strickland's incisive article, **"The Rape of Ms. Marvel."** A third of a year has passed, and the whole subject of Ms. Marvel's ordeal is fresh once again in my mind [thanks to the release of **AVENGERS ANNUAL #10**]. This new annual, written by Chris Claremont, is most important because it completely vindicates everything Ms. Strickland put forth in her article of several months ago. I don't know if you are particularly interested in this subject any more; you undoubtedly received dozens of letters on it within days of the release of **LOC #1**. Whatever the case, this letter ensures that you will have heard from at least one reader whose positive views on **AVENGERS #200** [the controversial "rape" issue] were actually printed in the letter column devoted to that story.

AVENGERS ANNUAL #10 shows that Ms. Marvel was indeed deprived of her will by the being called Marcus. She was used by him, plain and simple. Furthermore, it is shown that several prominent Avengers carelessly allowed all of this to happen, resulting in much pain, grief and shame for the heroine.

Chris Claremont and Carol Strickland have viewed the events of **AVENGERS #200** from the same perspective, the **right** perspective. Ms. Strickland made her points very forcefully and convincingly in her article. Claremont, in a way, makes these points "official" as far as the Marvel universe is concerned. Claremont has taken steps toward reversing the unfortunate attitude of #200, which will never stand as a complete story again.

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BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS!
PLUS: A SHOCKING MYSTERY GUEST!
?
ALL THAT AND A CAMEO APPEARANCE BY THE UNCANNY X-MEN!
1982 Marvel Comics Group

Correspondent Michael Burkhalter explains that, between Carol Strickland's *"The Rape of Ms. Marvel"* in *LOC #1* and the events which transpired in *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10*, he feels forced to reconsider his previously favorable opinion of *AVENGERS #200*.

There is no debate about this rape any more. No one in a proper frame of mind can really give the nod to **AVENGERS #200** any more. With a little hindsight, and a lot of **insight** from Ms. Strickland, it becomes easy for me to reverse my position on that "anniversary special." This change of heart may seem too convenient to some of you out there. I might be accused of "hasty explanations before the firing squad" or "switching sides in the heat of battle" or whatever. At any rate, it is regrettable that I [or anyone else] could have said anything positive about #200.

Why did my original comments appear? Was I too reluctant to criticize a story by David Michelinie, who had written fine stories for the series in the months before #200? Was it yet another case of too-casual reading? Did I give the benefit of the doubt to the writer just because of my high expectations for the anniversary issue? I might ponder this question for weeks and not come up with a satisfactory explanation.

I suppose I could take this opportunity to grumble about a couple of things, such as the way my letter of comment was excised of all negative remarks. I am still annoyed at the way Marvel added an exclamation point at the close of my letter [something done for an added positive effect]. In that last sentence I intended to express a bit of unease and uncertainty about the departure of Ms. Marvel under such circumstances. In the lettercol, it came out sounding like bright-eyed, daffy, blue-sky optimism.

But these are all small things. I am not trying to toss a lot of disclaimers around. No rationalizing is intended here. I'll take the responsibility of owning up to anything I did say in that letter. A big lesson has been learned here, and I certainly hope that I show a little more discretion and wisdom in evaluating comics that I read.

Now that Carol Strickland has said her piece, and now that Chris Claremont has written his story, perhaps super-heroines everywhere will be trated with a little more respect and love. I think that is something that we all want. Personally, I would like to believe that I share Ms. Strickland's views on simple human dignity and respect toward womankind. My past appreciation of **AVENGERS #200** has left me feeling... unclean. I don't want that feeling. After muich thought, I feel it is best to defer to Ms. Strickland's keen judgment. Today, I do so gladly.

Thank you, all. This has been a learning experience.

Thank you for letting us know your feelings, Michael. Frankly, I think you're safe from accusations of "hasty explanations before the firing squad." If you had sounded insincere in your letter, it might be different, but you obviously mean what you say.

Actually, I find the most interesting part of your letter to be the paragraph in which you mention that your letter of comment was "excised of all negative remarks" when printed. It appears that someone at Marvel realized the company's error on AVENGERS #200, and tried to gloss over it.

Whatever the case, let's hope the companies have learned from this mistake.

Jeffrey C. Branch
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Carol,

I found your article on **"Why Women Read Archie Comics"** to be very interesting, and since I'm a big fan of archie, I thought I'd respond to it. I'm something of a "minority" fan who enjoys reading the adventures of Archie and company, which, according to the demographics you stated, say that only boys not out of puberty read them. As you read this, I am twenty-two and a Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy who's been reading Archies **since** I was twelve, along with every super-hero book being published today. I'm a flexible comics collector/fanatic and I read Archies when I want to escape the realm of super-heroes and get a good chuckle as a release from the cosmic, world-shaking calamities that I'm addicted to from the Marvel and DC books. In fact, my favorite title—and I'm not embarrassed to admit it—is **BETTY AND VERONICA** [the current cheesecake queens of comics] followed by the people's choice, **THE X-MEN**.

You were right when you said that women want more out of comics than the slam-bang, city-wrecking fights in the super-hero books. It seems fairly obvious that they're looking for some kind of basically non-violent four-color entertainment, like they had in books like **YOUNG LOVE, TEEN-AGE ROMANCES**, and so on. Now, I can't honestly speak for any women who read comics because I know none, but in my opinion, as much as the visual expression and body language are important to female readers of comics, the main reason I read **ARCHIE** and all the other companion books is for the realism as much as for the humor. For forty years, Archie and company have been—and still are—a mirror on society that could well have its counterparts in real life anywhere in America. Try to find that sense of realism in the super-hero books [I've found that only **JONAH HEX, SGT. ROCK** and maybe, **maybe MASTER OF KUNG FU** barely come close in that department]. But then realism in the super-hero department isn't the norm anyway.

The stories in the Archie line do have that aura of realism—though at times exaggerated—that you spoke of and that women no doubt appreciate, from the comical in Betty and Veronica's never-ending battles for Archie's attention, to Jughead's fanatical love of food and hatred of girls, to Reggie's suicidal attempts to date Midge without getting his head beat in by Big Moose. Then to the serious stemming from the **LIFE WITH ARCHIE** stories of the early 1970s that dealt with the problems teenagers had to, and probably still have to, cope with [i.e. drugs, the draft, crime, prejudice, etc.], to the stories in **ARCHIE AT RIVERDALE HIGH** which could happen in any high school in the country. These are the kinds of stories that most male readers have

steered away from for the excitement of the super-hero genre. But as I said, I'm very flexible, so I can enjoy both genres very much.

Lastly, when you described Veronica as "bitchy" I couldn't help but laugh, because you really hit the nail on the head with that one. As for Betty and her "All-American Girl image," she reminds me a lot of Marie Osmond at times in terms of personality and overkill sweetness. Now how close to that aura of realism can you get with that?

Well, this letter has run long enough, so I'll close it up. Even though I probably didn't know what I was talking about from the beginning, I hope you'll respond to it anyway. You have a great magazine here and it's excellent reading. Good luck and take care.

Jeffrey, it seems to me that you're another example of my belief that people who feel they don't have much to say have plenty of interest to others. We enjoyed your comments comparing the Archie line to the DC and Marvel super-hero books. The Archie characters are becoming—if they are not already—archetypes (Archietypes?), and it is pretty easy to find examples of them almost anywhere, not just in a high school. School does seem to be the perfect setting for these characters.

Thanks again for your letter. Keep in touch.

Darren Madigan
Syracuse NY

Dear Richard and Carol [or whoever's editing by the time this arrives],

Well, here it is—my eagerly-awaited commentary on **LOC #3.** You **were** eagerly awaiting it, weren't you? With bated breath and whatnot? Of course you were. Silly of me to doubt you.

Anyhow, about the issue—first, congratulations on the **"Venus"** article by Richard. Not only was it humorous, informative and just generally nifty, but the art was beeOOOteefulls! More Howell art, I say!

Other high points of the issue—Chuck Huber and Doug Martin's **"Super-Heroes, Vigilantes, and the Law"** was wonderful. I enjoyed it thoroughly; it's about time someone sat down and tried to figure out exactly what kind of laws the various comic book universe operate under. [Legal laws, that is; the physical laws are something else again—figuring out the sort of physics that allows Superman to push the Earth around, Bruce Banner to add 800 pounds of body mass and shred everything **but** his pants, and all the other bizarre things that occur in comics would take a whole 'nother article. And don't look at me to write it; I don't know enough about science to write on a wall...] Also very good was Margaret O'Connell's **"Helpful Hints for Marriage-Minded Scripters,"** Lou Mougin's **"God and Man in Comics,"** and Van Hise's **"The Risks of Comics Writing."**

On an intermediate level: Though I found both the Thompson's **"More Ado About Less"** and Ward's **"No Comics For Alicia"** interesting and well-written, I still find myself thinking of them as much ado about not-so-much. Ward's thesis was that there aren't enough handicapped people portrayed in comics, and those that are there are portrayed badly. This is a fine concept and should be communicated, but I doubt he needed so much space in which to do it. Once called to our attention, these facts are self-evident; he doesn't have to prove his thesis the same way that someone else might have to prove, say, that the latest spate of **DAREDEVIL** comics have been sadistic, gratuitously violent, derivative of Batman, unnecessarily grisly, callous, and more than a little twisted. It's quite obvious that there are very few handicapped people in comics, and it's just as obvious, once you think about it, that they aren't handled particularly well—especially seeing as how very fwe [if any] of the writers handling the characters are handicapped themselves. [Of course, it seems just as obvious that **DAREDEVIL** lately has become a slightly sick, psychotic, and unhealthy comic book. I mean, if you count up the times DD has belted people with that steel stick he carries around with him since Frank Miller started writing the book, and you compare it with all the times he did it before Frank Miller took over, you at least get food for thought. Not to mention Bullseye's transformation from cool, level-headed professional to geebling psycho, as well as the advent of Elektra, who not only goes around stabbing people with blunt knives but who sometimes takes up more space doing it than DD does doing whatever it is that he's doing that issue.] But I'm digressing, and I shouldn't do that—**DD**'s descent into depravity is the subject for an article, not a letter. Similarly to Ward's article, I found the Thompsons' dissertation quite a lot of hoohaw about an idea that really didn't deserve it. Aside from listing a lot of trivia [and awfully trivial trivia, at that], the only result the article had that I could see was to make any average fan feel like three pounds of guano in a thirty-pound bag. I mean, sure, I don't read everything in comics format that comes out in a year, and I certainly haven't read everything in comics format that's been published everywhere in the known universe. Certainly, I'm missing out on at least some good stuff. Should I feel guilty? I don't think so. Should they try to make me feel guilty? Nope.

On the letters: aside from the fact that you didn't print **mine**, the letters section this time was pretty good. [I hear mine is in the next issue, anyhow.] Ann Nichols' letter was great—too bad she didn't write the **DARK SHADOWS** stuff up as an article; she could've gotten paid for it and there would've been more of it. [I know, I know—who was just lecturing on the inappropriateness of articles of articles on other media unconnected with comics appearing in **LOC**? Blush...] Ronny Richardson, on the other hand, is a very silly person. [D'you hear me, Ronny?] Carol Danvers is presented as a role model for all womanhood to emulate in **AVENGERS #200**... WHAT? Sure, all women should toddle off hand-in-hand to make love with those people who [a] they have been ravished by, [b] they have been blatantly manipulated, both physically and emotionally, and [c] according to Richardson, they love and cherish as a son! Three cheers for incestual rape! Richardson uses Carol [Danvers]' supposed motherly love for Marcus as a major basis for his attack on Strickland's article; the fact that he then turns around and beamingly approves of Danvers' blithely going off to another dimension to make passionate love with this person she regards as her son I find not only silly, but slightly nauseating. But I do agree, the articles should be referenced better [he says as he wincingly tries to recall if he identified all his references in his last article], but I also understand all the practical difficulties. I guess we'll all have to do the best we can... Nothing else in the letters struck any particular chord with me, so I'll shut up for now about it.

Final note: More original art!

You've probably noticed, Darren, that we edited your comments about "Flush Going." To tell the truth, we thought they overstepped the bounds of fair criticism and started to edge into vehemence. As for the appropriateness of the strip in LOC, though, we repeat our response to Gary Dunaier—commentary can take many forms, not just articles. And Alex Raymond's FLASH GORDON strips are still beautiful and exciting; everyone in the movie did Raymond's memory a gross injustice.

There are many rationalizations for any of those scientific oddities that occur in comics; the one I lean to is Marv Wolfman's "They're comic books!" explanation. If you want to get more specific about it, however, it's obvious that certain laws that apply in our universe do not apply in others—and, given that, it becomes harder and harder to decide just which laws do and do not apply, especially since the companies have never been particularly consistent about these things.

I very much doubt that the Thompsons were trying to make you—or any reader—feel like "three pounds of guano in a thirty-pound bag" (isn't it the other way around?). It was more a suggestion: If the comics are late in arriving at your local shop, try something

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Lou Mougin's *"God and Man in Comics"* scored highly with our readers, including Darren Madigan. The series will be concluded in *LOC #6*.

else. Or set up a trade deal with a fan in another country. Whatever—granted that you can't know everything about everything, you can still give yourself a surprise every once in a while.

Again, we'll state our preference that the letter column remain a readers' forum for debates such as the Ms. Marvel discussion. I do think, however, that you misinterpret one of Richardson's points. If you'll check, he was praising her courage in facing a number of horrible, revolting events. That is something to emulate—one hopes one never needs to, but if the worst does happen, at least face it with courage.

We're working on getting more never-before-seen artwork into our pages. Stay tuned...

Only three letters this time, folks. What's wrong? Surely you have something to say, about the articles and letters we're currently printing or about a topic we've somehow overlooked. Let us know about it. This is your magazine as much as it is ours. Remember our new address:

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